

EDUCATING THE INDIAN WOMAN

The Story of Sharda Devan

ASHA NATH

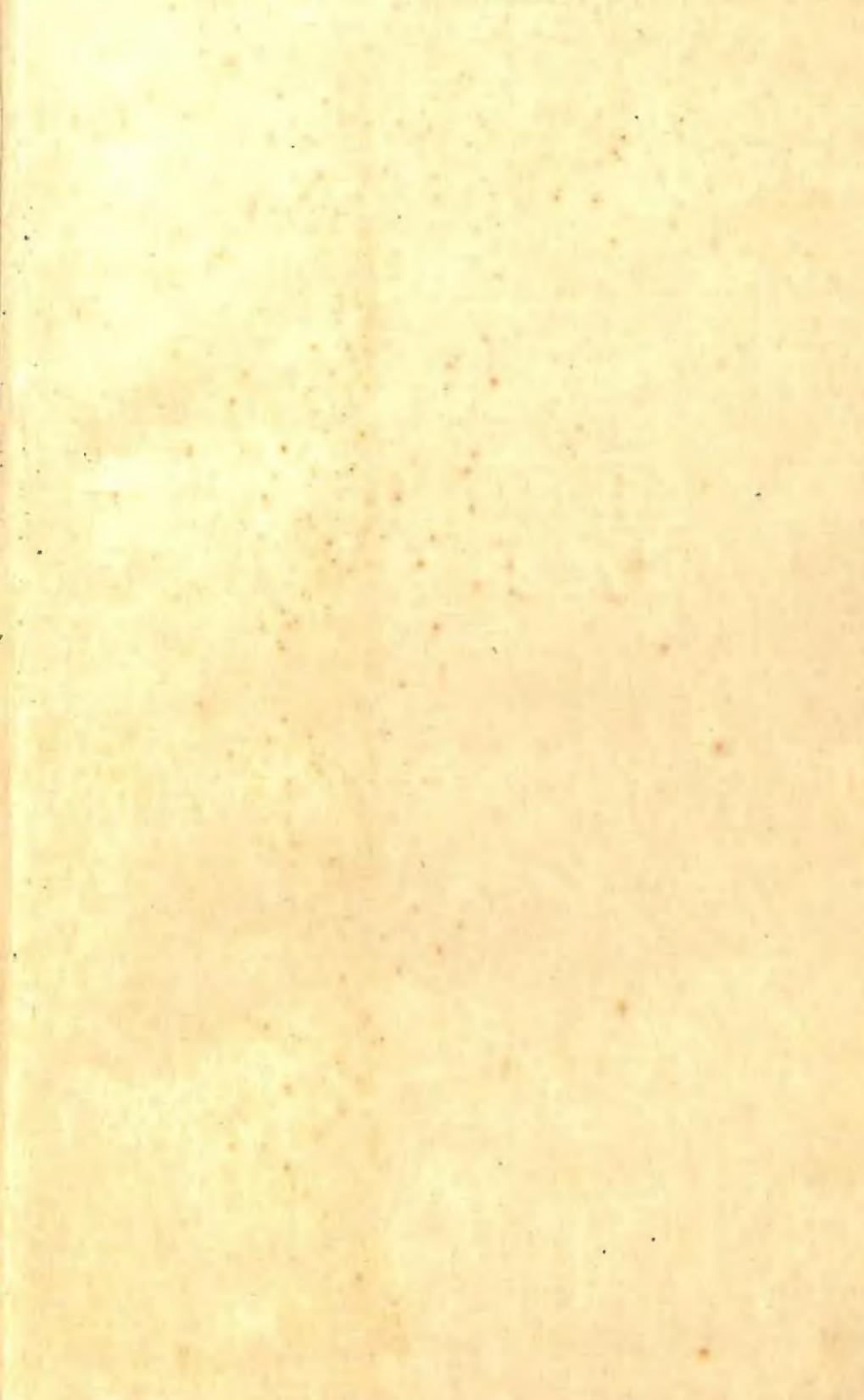
This book discusses how determined and pioneering crusaders have enabled Indian women to have access to education, particularly higher education, and social freedom, which was considered unimaginable social behaviour for Indian girls and women in the early part of this century.

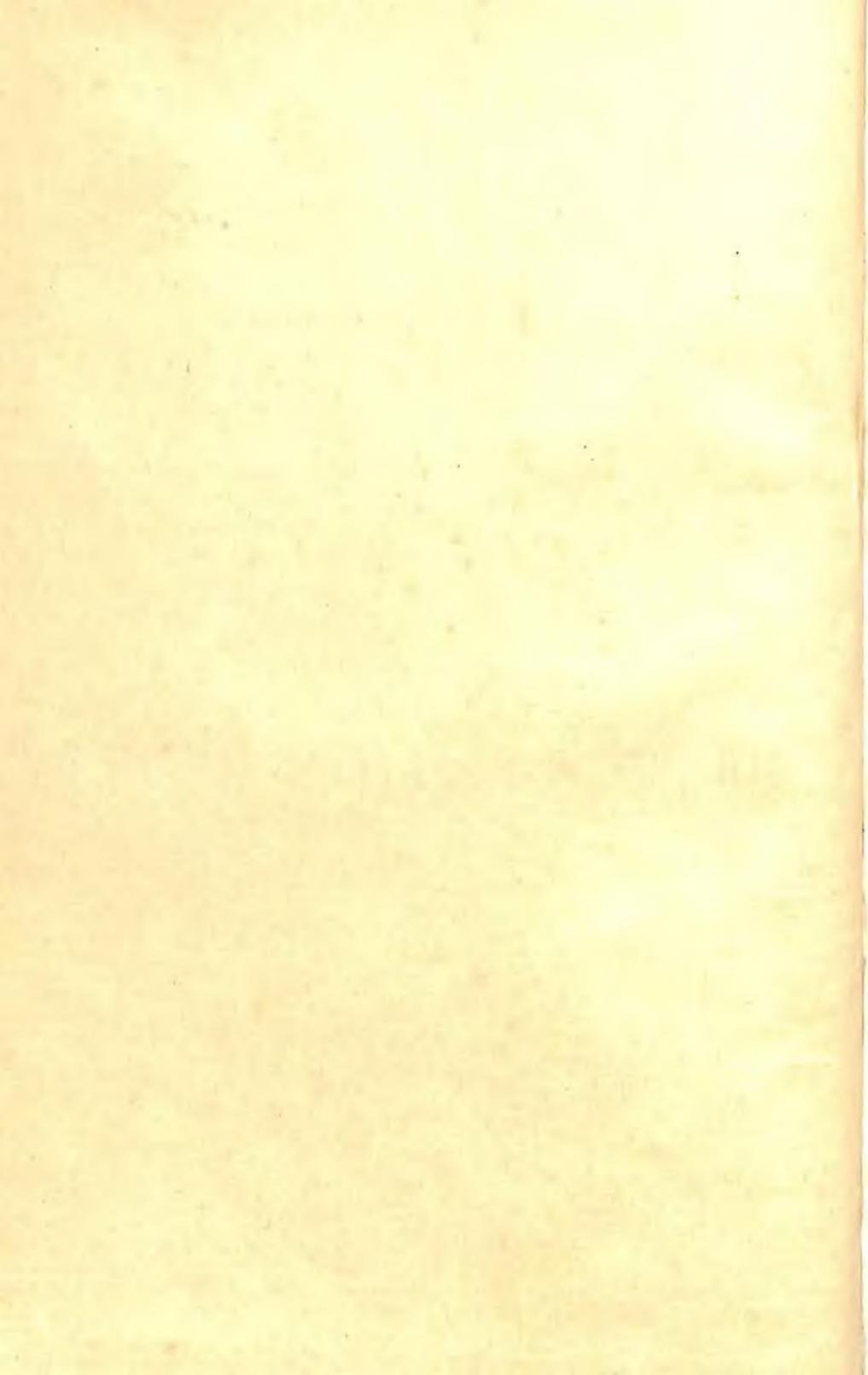
This volume portrays the life of Sharda Divan -- a well-known Gujarati educationist, woman activist and social worker -- in the form of a contemporary historical and social narrative. It highlights her role as the first Registrar, Dean and Vice-Chancellor (1969-1975) of the Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) Women's University, Bombay. It discusses how, alongwith Lady Thackersey, she helped to build and develop the SNDT Women's University, a university that was to become a unique institution for women's education in the country.

This book is indispensable reading for all those who are interested in sociology, education, women's studies and those who wish to understand the struggle for educating women in India.

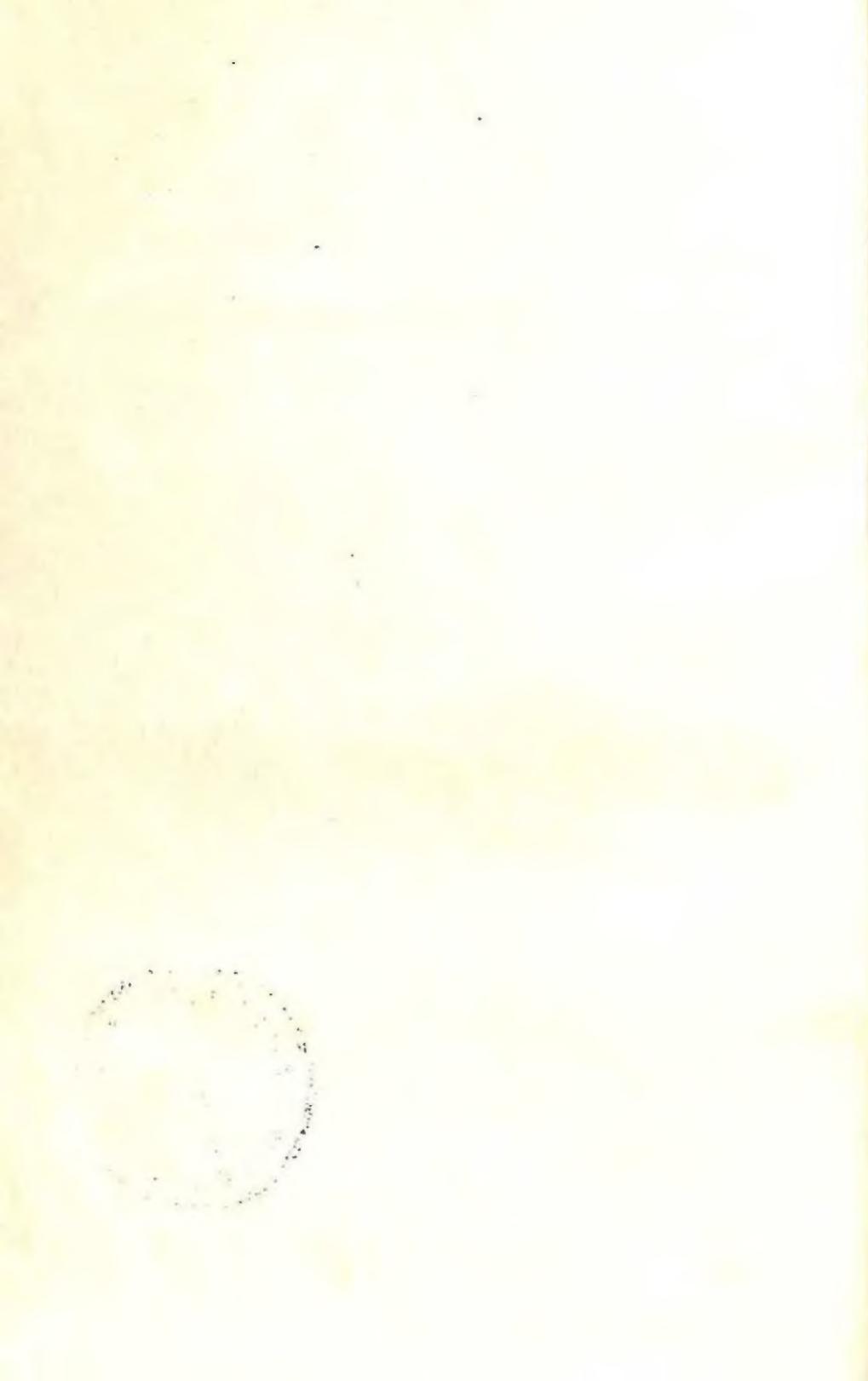
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ASHA NATH



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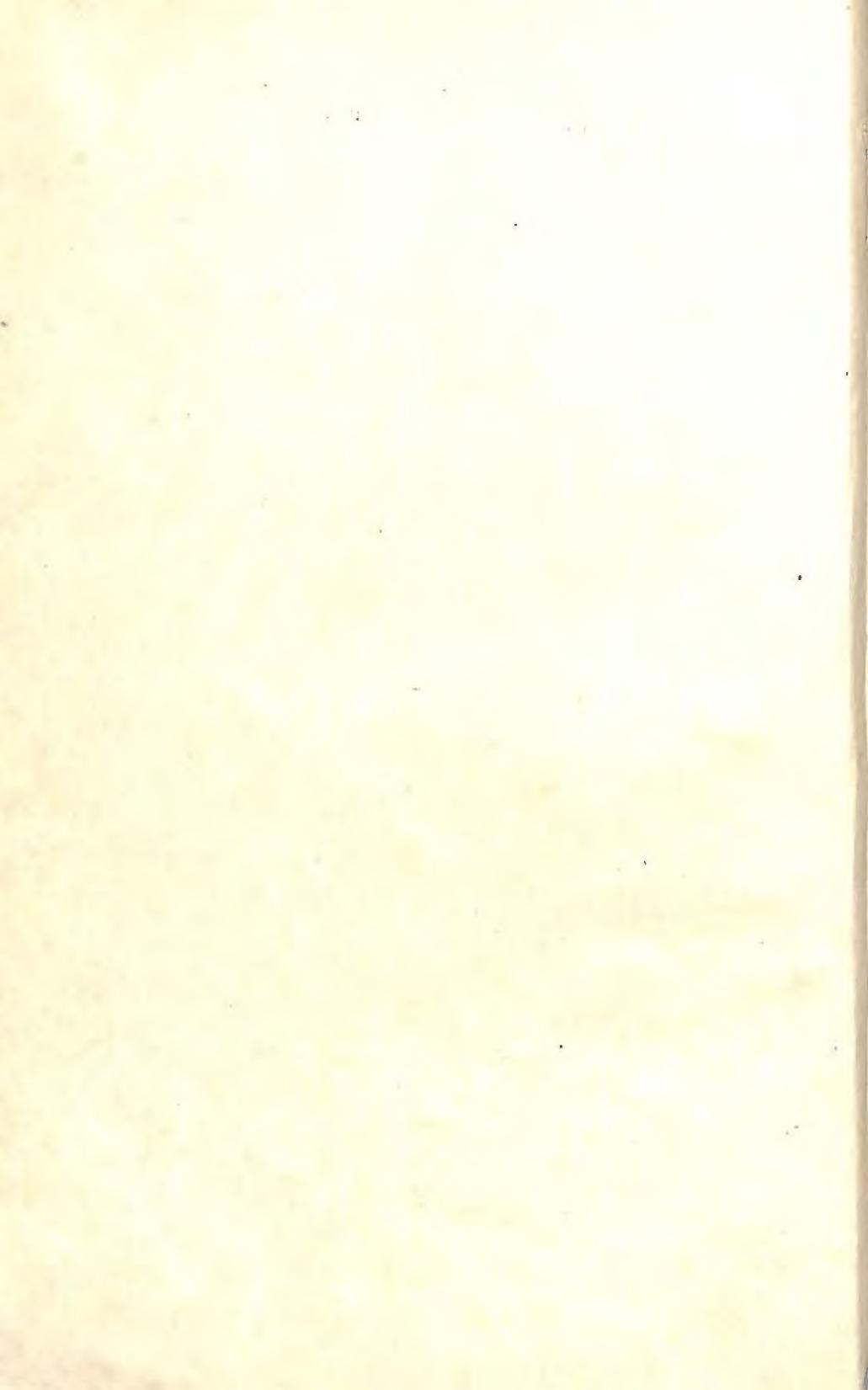
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To

Anjani



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Preface

The idea of writing this biography emerged in the course of one long, hot summer when my children and I spent a holiday with my grandmother on my parents' farm. Listening to Nani talk to my girls of her own childhood and growing years and exposing the difference time had wrought for the Indian girl-child in the comparatively short space of just three generations, I wanted to compile these little anecdotes more as a record for the family for the day she would no longer be with us.

My grandmother represents a generation of stalwart and pioneering women who overcame tremendous odds to firstly be allowed access to "learning" and secondly to prove and exercise their rights as individuals equal to men in terms of intelligence and intellectual capability. Today, because of women like her, education is so much a part of every little girl's life that it seems unimaginable that just a hundred years ago Indian girls had neither books to study with nor schools or colleges to go to.

Education, as my grandmother has often told me, is for a human being the means of transforming him or herself into a complete individual. I have seen and heard her convincing children and young women of all walks of life to develop the curiosity of wanting and needing to know and learn more than they do and consequently living a life that is purpose-oriented and not a span to be lived out in the form of mere existence.

I would like to express my gratitude to all who helped me research the background material on women's education in India and the "old guard" of the SNDT who provided me with data on Dr. Karve and the University.

My special thanks to my family -- my daughters, Amala and Amrita, who, I hope, will someday prove their inheritance in terms of determination and diligence in the pursuit of whatever dreams they may weave for themselves; my husband, Achal, who humoured

me and put things back into their right perspective when I couldn't fit words and phrases into the puzzle that this book had at one stage become; my father, Nicky, who patiently read and commented on the manuscript as it developed, and, most of all, my mother, Anjani, to whom this book is dedicated and to whom both Sharda and I are deeply indebted.

New Delhi
July 1991

ASHA NATH

1

The Schoolgirl in British India, 1903-1919

"Some soak up the wisdom of life, while others can't absorb it."¹

Books and Barriers, Culture and Conflict

She came into the world on January 31, 1903. The sixth and youngest child of Sir Chimanlal and Lady Krishnagauri Setalvad,² she was born in an India beginning to experience the first stirrings of a need to be free -- an awareness that was to grow and be the main focus of life in that country during the next four decades.

Fate bestowed on this infant girl-child the name of Sharda Gauri -- Sharda, the goddess of knowledge, of learning -- although her parents could hardly have imagined, looking at the squalling, red-faced baby, that her destiny would lead her to embody the spirit of the name they had decided on for her.

Hers was destined to be a life of struggle and achievement, her pursuit of a career would call for tremendous determination and would shatter the mould in which the young women of her generation were expected to form, her marriage and motherhood would demand vast reserves of courage and conviction. She would prove to her own and succeeding generations that, for a woman, marriage and motherhood did not have to exclude pursuing a personal ambition and fulfilling it.

But all this lay in the distant future and Sharda, like any other baby, learnt to walk and talk and hold her own in the large family she had been born into. Ancient Hindu scriptures state that a human soul chooses to be born into the family and environment that is most conducive to the course his or her life is to take. Sharda, as the

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future would prove, had indeed "chosen" her family. The Setalvads were indisputably "achievers" and almost from babyhood expected to make something of themselves and live up to the name they bore.

Chimanlal's ancestors originally hailed from the Punjab and formed part of a community of Kshatriyas³ called the "talvads" whose leaders, *seths*, were titled "seth-talvad" or "lords of the talvads". A great number of these "talvads" migrated to Gujarat in the 18th century and were known there as *brahma-kshatriyas*, the result of a mingling of the Brahmin⁴ (priestly) and Kshatriya (warrior) social classes. Records show them to have been important participants in the political and social life of their times and characterize them as having been honest, intelligent, shrewd and diplomatic citizens.

Ambashankar Brijrai⁵, Chimanlal's grandfather, was the first in five succeeding generations of lawyers. He was appointed as the Chief Sadar Amin of the province of Gujarat, the highest judicial seat that a native of India could aspire to in the mid-nineteenth century. His son, Harilal,⁶ in his turn, occupied the post of Sadar Amin of Ahmedabad and on retirement from the same was appointed Diwan of the State of Limbdi in Kathiawar, Gujarat. True to the tradition begun by his forefathers, Chimanlal too entered the legal profession where he rapidly proceeded to carve out his own, unparalleled niche.

At the time of Sharda's birth, he was an eminent lawyer of the Bombay Bar. A somewhat gaunt figure, he was of average height with dark hair smoothly parted at one side and a small, neatly trimmed moustache over a firm and thin-lipped mouth set in uncompromising lines. Deep-set dark eyes glowed above prominent cheekbones and a large, bony nose. There was an immediate impression of tremendous character in his face and appearance. It was the look of "a man of transcendent legal acumen, a debater, an educationist and a politician".⁷ In 1903, the year of Sharda's birth, he had just rejoined the Bombay Legislative Council as one of its leading members after an absence of six years.

Sharda's mother, Krishnagauri, was Chimanlal's second wife, his first having died within a year of their marriage. Krishnagauri, fair and round of face with full, smiling lips was, in appearance, the complete opposite of her somewhat ascetic-looking husband. She more than made up for this difference by being his equal in strength and determination and was not averse to exerting her strong will and impressive temper when the occasion warranted. She too came from

a "legal-minded" family. Her father, Narbheram Raghunathdas Thakore⁸ was the Government Pleader in Ahmedabad and considerably assisted Chimanlal in the latter's early years of practice. An extremely dignified and practical lady, Krishnagauri provided the perfect foil for the meteoric rise of her husband's career, maintaining a household to suit his position and inculcating in their children the intrinsic values that were their birthright.

The Setalvads lived in a house at Walkeshwar, the sloping promontory of land boldly jutting out into the sea, in Bombay. When Sharda was born, their eldest son Motilal⁹, the future Attorney-General of independent India, was completing his studies at the Elphinstone College of the Bombay University and preparing, inevitably, to pursue a career in law. Sharda's earliest memories were of this eldest brother, affectionately known as *motabhai* (elder brother) who played the role of father to the Setalvad children as Chimanlal was, in those years, kept very busy with not only the legal profession but also his deep commitment to politics and education in the Bombay Presidency. It was Motilal who helped his mother look after the household and younger children and supervised their growing-up, he who taught them that "no prize in life can equal the happiness which one draws from an affectionate family". To the Setalvads, the word "family" meant much more than a mere relationship -- it signified an unbreakable bond of caring and support that must endure over a lifetime.

When Sharda was still a very small child, Chimanlal moved his family to another home. The new bungalow was a vast and palatial residence situated off Nepean Sea Road in the little lane which was later named "Setalvad Lane" after him.

The house was a veritable mansion, built on a sprawling plot of land adjoining the sea. Outer walls of cool white, bleached cream by the sun, sheltered under roof tiles of a warm red faded in parts to pale pink. Long, open verandahs surrounded the house on three sides. Tall, glass-paned windows were shuttered by slatted wooden louvers to keep out the glare of the sun's brilliant rays on the waters of the Arabian Sea. The structure rose commandingly in the midst of a great expanse of lush, verdant lawn thrown into stark relief against the riotous colours of the flower beds banking it on three sides. Stately tropical trees traced their long shadows on the springy grass and at the height of Bombay's humid summer, plundering breezes blowing off the ocean scattered a bright harvest of rich, orange

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blooms from the *gulmohars*. A low stone wall separated the property from the rocky beach some little distance below, acting as a buffer for the stormy ocean waves that crashed close at high tide.

An imposing driveway curved before the main portico of the house between the entrance and exit gates. There was a small crescent-shaped front garden and shallow marble steps led up to the main door. On entering, one found oneself in a great hall with large suites of rooms leading into the four corners. The right-hand wing housed a reception room known as "my lady's boudoir". It was lavishly furnished with ornately carved furniture of rosewood and teak, richly embroidered tapestries and plush velvet drapes at the windows, elegantly tasseled cords holding their pleats together. A generation later, Sharda's own children and many nieces and nephews would swing gleefully from those curtains, dramatically enacting the exploits of Tarzan with suitably bloodcurdling shrieks and the formidable old house would echo with the sound of their laughter and merriment.

The left wing of the building consisted of a suite of bedrooms usually occupied by house-guests of which there were always a number for many of the Setalvad cousins from Gujarat would stay with their uncle and aunt while completing college and university studies in Bombay. To the rear lay a small temple room with an adjoining strong-room where money and valuables were kept and which was cleaned only by members of the family. The back of the house was composed of two similar suites of rooms, one of which was occupied by Krishnagauri. Next door was a smaller suite initially occupied by Motilal and his wife. Later, when the couple moved to their own home in the newly developed suburb of Juhu, it came to be known as the "confinement room" in which Setalvad grandchildren would come into the world. A staircase wound upwards from the large hall on the ground level to the first floor. Here were Chimanlal's impressive library -- row upon row of legal tomes, bound in buttersoft leather, engraved with his initials and stacked with care -- and his personal suite of rooms as well as those of the younger children.

At the rear of the property, screened from the main house by thickly tumbling bougainvillea creepers in a mass of vibrant shocking pink stood a row of quarters for the domestic staff and their families. Adjoining stables housed a shaggy grey Shetland pony and small victoria carriage to drop and fetch the younger Setalvads from their primary school and a magnificent red Australian stallion to draw the

Setalvad landau.

To the tiny Sharda this bungalow was the castle in which childish fantasies were played out with her sister, Kusum Gauri¹⁰, who was closest to her in age. The little girls wandered through the suites of rooms, played hide-and-seek on the staircase, touched the volumes in their father's magnificent library on the first floor with suitably reverent awe, observed the rituals performed by their mother in her little temple room, peeked, when allowed, into the strong-room next to it and scampered through the courtyard and kitchen singing and laughing in their childish treble. As boisterous as they were demure, they joined their older brothers, Jivanlal¹¹ and Venkatrao,¹² in games of cricket on the lawn facing the sea and badminton in the rectangular courtyard in the centre of the bungalow.

In an attempt to interest his children in all aspects of life and acquaint them with nature and animals as far as the restraints of living in a city would permit, Chimanlal brought home a small stag as a pet for the family -- it shared the run of the garden with two fluffy white, red-eyed rabbits and a dog named Manki. In a corner of the back garden a little wooden hutch housed a family of beady-eyed white mice and this miniature zoo that Chimanlal had put together for his children was a source of much joy, particularly for the younger ones.

Both Chimanlal and Krishnagauri believed in educating their children well and exposing them to life outside of the affluence they encountered at home. Although every material comfort was provided by the wealth that Chimanlal, an entirely self-made man, had earned by dint of his hard work, Krishnagauri, an astute and practical lady ensured that none of her children grew up spoilt or pampered. The girls, from an early age, were trained to cope with routine, household chores and taught the rudiments of all that would be demanded of them as future wives and mothers.

Life at home was orthodox and followed traditional patterns but there was one rare and distinctly important social factor which distinguished Chimanlal and Krishnagauri from most of the other parents of their generation -- as far as education was concerned, their daughters were given as much access as their sons to the best that the Bombay of that era had to offer.

Their attitude was perhaps attributable to the fact that Chimanlal himself made a tremendous contribution to the cause of education in the Bombay Presidency and perhaps the most unique service he

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rendered was to the Bombay Corporation by his association as Chairman of the Schools Committee for a record period of twenty years from 1902 to 1921. As Chairman of this Committee he gave a tremendous fillip to the education of the masses. During his tenure, the progress of primary education was phenomenal and the appreciation of his long and dedicated commitment to the spread of elementary knowledge conferred on him the title of "the father of primary education in Bombay".¹³

The Setalvad girls were fortunate to have had two important advantages: they belonged to an elite social strata -- the wealthy, educated, progressive Indian family and they were born in the first decade of the twentieth century by which time women's education had become an important issue despite the stiff opposition accorded to it.

A century earlier, the Bombay Government had instituted an enquiry into the state of indigenous education -- reports, relating to attendance in the common schools of the province, submitted by various officials did not record a single female student!¹⁴ In none of the despatches on education submitted to or received from the Court of Directors of the East India Company during the first half of the nineteenth century was any reference made to girls' education. With the exception of a very small number of Christian missionaries and Indian social reformers, no efforts were made to introduce a formal system of education for women. The East India Company had conveniently adopted the stand that female education was a controversial issue as far as the Indian masses, who viewed it with dread and suspicion, were concerned. The Company was not prepared to confront this opposition; it preferred to ignore the issue and pretend that it did not exist.

An innate antipathy towards female education had prevailed in the Indian mind for centuries. It was rooted in a fearful and chauvinistic belief that education would give a woman earning power and an independent status equal to a man's, adversely affect her feminine qualities and her essential obedience and ultimately result in social disgrace. Education officers in rural districts reported how difficult it was to get parents to educate their daughters. Parents felt that if their daughters learnt to read and write they would no longer weekly perform the daily household duties for which they were indispensable. There was also the practical orthodox apprehension that educated girls would be less likely to accept their parents' choice

of a husband. It was not only the men who opposed women's education. In those years, illiterate women too looked upon educated women with a terrified suspicion born of misguided fear and ignorance, believing all too often that they were witches and determining to protect their children from them. The domestic role in which women were cast fostered the belief that education for girls was wasted because it had no economic function and could not be put to any financial use. A man needed education in order to work and to earn. What tangible financial return would educating a girl, in that era of child marriage when it was rare to find one above the age of ten or eleven unmarried, bring to her parents to justify the expense incurred in educating her?

A year after his arrival in India in 1830, the Scottish missionary John Wilson, founder of the Wilson College in Bombay, said that he had not met a single Indian of any position in Bombay "who had the slightest idea of giving an education to his daughters, who would in conversation admit its desirableness, or entrust his daughter to the care of those who would seek to communicate it."¹⁵

In Western India in the 1840s it was the Parsis¹⁶ who took the initiative of being the first to educate their women. Parsi girls were taught at home, often secretly. Maharashtrian and Gujarati Hindu social reformers followed the Parsi example. They began to educate their wives at home and started private schools for girls. Experimental schools, three for Hindu and four for Parsi girls, were started in 1847 by the student members of the Students' Literary and Scientific Society of the Elphinstone Institution in Bombay. The opening of these schools proved, in the history of education of the Bombay Presidency, to be a precursor and incentive for other such institutions to be organised and run by social reformers and prominent Indian businessmen in cities like Ahmedabad and Surat in Gujarat and Pune in Maharashtra.

In 1853, William Jacob in his evidence before the Select Committee of Parliament stated: "I do not think a single female has come under the government system of education in Western India yet."¹⁷ In the city of Bombay, the Government did not open a girls' school till 1873.

Although the cause of women's education and social position had been championed by social reformers earlier, the debate on the subject grew more intense towards the end of the nineteenth century as evidenced by the increasing number of writings reflecting on the

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status of Indian women and the need for educating them which appeared during this period. Indian leaders and social reformers had, by this time, begun to vocalize their conviction that educating a girl meant educating a family. "Unless the women are educated, the education of India will be partial, and at best, superficial, for the women of the country conserve all the traditions, all the errors and prejudices, and all the injurious institutions that exist in the country....if you educate the females, you give my country good mothers, who will train up their children in the fear and in the love of God, and in the appreciation and enjoyment of truth, and in that way our people will not only become intelligent men but will have intelligent and happy homes."¹⁸

Little Sharda -- a now faded photograph shows her to have been a solemn child with deep-set eyes, a slightly prominent nose, long, black hair, a small mouth set in a determined straight line and a somewhat pensive expression.

Being the youngest in a household of six children had its advantages. Her eldest sister, Padma¹⁹, was a frail young woman who often had to leave the moist, warm climate of Bombay for the reviving, cooler air of nearby hill stations like Matheran, Mahableshwar, Panchgani and Deolali. As she could not attend school, Chimanlal had engaged a governess to teach her English while she was away from home and Sharda would accompany her on these trips and enjoy the unexpected holidays. Leaving Bombay on these journeys was an adventure. A train could not travel all the way to Mahableshwar, a popular hill resort. The last station was in the sleepy, small outpost of Wai. There the travellers would be handed up into a horse-drawn phaeton carriage known colloquially as a "fatting" and rattle slowly upwards watching the heat-hazed plains recede into the distance. Matheran and Mahableshwar were frequently deserted and lonely during the off-season period and the young Padma and her two faithful maids took precautions to ensure that the household was not vulnerable to a break-in. At night, extra beds arranged with rolled-up mattresses covered by quilts to resemble sleeping persons would be placed in such a way that they could be clearly seen through the large glass-paned doors to deter would-be intruders. Padma, much older in age, mothered Sharda too. Married while Sharda was still very young, she treated her sister on a par with her own little daughter who grew up to be a friend rather than a niece to her. The little girl and her scarcely older aunt played together,

invented outdoor and indoor games when they ran out of toys and books and mischievously conspired to sneak into the kitchen and eat the delicious imported English biscuits that Padma kept in a large tin for her baby son.

Although Chimanlal did not see much of his children and was unable to spend as much time with them as he may have liked to, owing to the pressures of work, he was nevertheless a good father in his own way, providing his children not only with material wealth but with an equal amount of the knowledge of life that mattered. An affectionate but somewhat reserved and undemonstrative man -- indeed, one of Sharda's childhood memories was of her father lining up the children one morning on his way to work and solemnly handing over a gold guinea accompanied by a pat on the head to each as a token of his affection! -- he taught them ethics and principles, the courage to stick to their convictions and a deep-rooted respect for work and self-discipline. Despite the increasing demands on his time, he found enough moments in his busy day to supervise their studies and to give them a liberal and broad-based education. Sharda, the littlest, was perhaps his favourite daughter and child -- it could be that he sensed in her even at that young age that quality which would one day lead her to follow in his footsteps and stand foremost in her chosen field.

In keeping with the dictates of the Setalvad household, she was enrolled in a Municipal Primary School at Girgaum. Kusum, a fair and pretty, round-faced, smiling youngster and Sharda would be driven to school in the Setalvad carriage and taught by a Parsi lady who obviously made a strong impact on the child for Sharda would remember her face nearly eight decades later.

At the age of seven, Sharda moved to the Chanda Ramji Girls' High School which taught in the Gujarati language medium. This school too had a Parsi staff headed by Miss Navajbai Contractor, a stern disciplinarian. Sharda was a favourite of her two teachers, Meherbai and Dhanbai, who found her eagerness to learn and her quick grasp of their teaching compelling.

Both these schools were situated in an area of Bombay that was populated by very orthodox Indians. Chimanlal, a staunch Liberal in thought and attitude, decided that his daughters should be removed from this "old-fashioned" atmosphere which could perhaps deter their educational growth and accordingly enrolled them in the Alcxandra Girls' Institute when Sharda was ten. Chimanlal's

decision was an accurate reflection of the tremendous influence that British educational policy in India had exerted on the upper-class educated Indian.

For almost two centuries after the granting of the Charter of the East India Company by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, education was a nebulous and undefined concept in India as far as the British were concerned. The British who first came to India were primarily traders who assumed little or no responsibility for educating the masses of this vast subcontinent; their sole interest lay in exploiting its untold potential riches.

It was not until 1834, when Lord Macaulay came to India and was appointed President of the Committee of Public Instruction, that a plan for anglicizing education in India was formulated. On February 2, 1835 Macaulay addressed his Minute on Indian Education to the Governor-General Lord Bentinck, effectively ending the long-standing debate between the Orientalists and the Anglicists on the vernacular versus English by deciding the issue in favour of the latter. In essence, Macaulay stipulated that all funds appropriated for the purpose of education should be employed for English education alone. The Minute was a brilliant masterpiece that unfortunately ridiculed Indian learning for it was penned by an individual who admittedly did not know anything about Indian culture and was not interested in it.

Confidently and arrogantly, Macaulay stated: "The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, [English], we shall teach languages in which by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, -- astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding-school, -- history, abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns 30,000 years long, -- and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter."²⁰

What seems curious in retrospect is the fact that the Minute was supported rather than rejected by many Indians who proved as determined as Macaulay to willingly forsake their inheritance and dismiss the vernacular languages on the basis of their supposed

inadequacy. Why did this happen?

One reason was that for these Indians, most of whom were socially prominent men, English symbolized access to the West. "By the beginning of this century the number of those receiving English education had increased and they were being educated in institutions which fostered in young men a "haughty spirit", stern independence, deep thought and burning patriotism, and produced graduates who would not be "cringing, devoid of self-respect, ignorant of their cultural heritage and indifferent to the humiliating inferiority which face them on all sides."²¹

The other factor favouring English was that, in 1835, the Indian vernaculars did not contain the requisite vocabulary for teaching Western knowledge and there was thus no real choice but to accept English as the medium of instruction. "The surveys of indigenous education conducted in the 1820s and 1830s revealed a strong desire for English education among the Indians themselves. Before these surveys were made, the prevalent opinion among the East India Company's officials was that the Hindus were hostile to Western education, but this myth was exploded by Adam who found that the desire to obtain a knowledge of the English language was so great that a school was "sure to dwindle away" unless it taught English. The knowledge of English, wrote Adam, was for the "native aspirant the grand road to distinction", and its attainment opened to him "the prospect of office, wealth and influence."²²

Not only did Lord Macaulay ask for a system of education that disdained the indigenous culture of India but he also called for an education of the higher ranks of society alone. In a Minute written in 1837 he wrote: "We do not at present aim at giving education directly to the lower classes of the people of this country. We aim at raising up an educated class who will hereafter, as we hope, be the means of diffusing among their countrymen some portion of the knowledge we have imparted to them."²³ The Committee of Public Instruction stated: "Better improve the education of the more respectable members of Indian society."²⁴

Education was left to follow a natural course of "downward filtration"; it was intended that knowledge should descend from the higher classes and gradually spread. It was a dangerous policy. As Arthur Mayhew commented: "With reference to hard facts it [the filtration theory] meant little more than that funds were strictly limited and sufficient only for circles where a real demand existed or

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could easily be stimulated, the need for English knowing public servants pressing and the difficulties of creating vernacular schools and text-books appalling...it would have been wiser to abstain from any further and dangerously metaphorical justification...a powerful weapon in the hands of those, who, through scepticism as to the possibilities of mass education, instinctive prejudice against broadcast culture or a selfish desire to appropriate all that was available for their caste fellows, were to display for fifty years or more chilling apathy, or at times even active opposition, towards the authorities' efforts to make the system less top-heavy."²⁵

This theory of education was supposedly accepted officially as the general policy right up to the time of Sir Charles Wood's Great Educational Despatch²⁶ in 1854, which created a stir in that it also raised and discussed the problem of female education. It was with this Despatch that the Government formally assumed responsibility for female instruction.

A summary of the Despatch of 1854 done by Arthur Holwell stated: "The main object of the Despatch of 1854 is to divert the efforts of Government from the education of the higher classes, upon whom they had up to that date been too exclusively directed, and to turn them to the wider diffusion of education among all classes of people...the medium of education is to be the vernacular languages of India, into which the best elementary treatises in English should be translated. While therefore, the vernacular languages are on no account to be neglected, the English language may be taught where there is a demand for it; but the English language is not to be substituted for the vernacular dialects of the country. Female education is to receive the frank and cordial support of Government, as by it a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men."²⁷

Wood's Despatch was the most significant document on education in India since the advent of the British in the country. To show that this document was to be the basis for the future pattern, Lord Stanley's Despatch of 1859 which formally accepted the principles of Wood's Despatch, differing only on a few points, was issued from England. Between the dates of these two Despatches, the Sepoy Mutiny was quelled and India passed from the Company to the Crown.

When Queen Victoria proclaimed the Empire of India as an

answer to the Indian Mutiny of 1857, elaborate measures were undertaken to both control governmental operation and promote education as one phase. Openly and formally before the world, the Government of India in 1858 accepted responsibility for the educational pattern of India as part of the duties of governing.

The pattern of education adopted in India after 1858 did, however, despite well-intentioned efforts to the contrary, take on the mould of the past for the people and the land were the same. The factors that influenced education had not entirely changed. Political, social and economic forces continued to act as ferment and catalysts.

There was also the very real argument that "the type of education generally provided for girls has failed to capture the imagination or win the goodwill of the people at large. It has been, generally speaking, a poor copy of the education imparted to boys, reproducing faithfully and sometimes exaggerating, its objectionable features. It has been too bookish, too academic, too remote from the environment and cultural needs of the people; it also lays the same undue stress on the study of English at the cost of other useful subjects and skills, and it sacrifices, in the interest of pseudo-literary culture, the real objectives of a harmonious, comprehensive and psychologically suitable education. In rural areas, in particular, parents are generally of the opinion that the education of girls will not do them much good, largely because there is no outlet in the life of the average villager for the kind of book knowledge now acquired by the girls. Their schooling does not adjust them successfully to their environment, nor does it enable them to become better villagers. In the larger towns and cities, however, there is an increasing demand for the education of girls, which gives them a better social status...."²⁸

The new school posed a challenge in that lessons were conducted in English and initially Sharda was hard put to cope with this "foreign" language. She spent her first few days in the school in a bewildered fashion, trying to understand the strange accents and words being mouthed at her. Her in-built determination helped her adjust however and she began to absorb her lessons with the British teachers, Miss Joseph and Miss Macdonald, who together with the school principal, Mrs. Stuart, were strict taskmasters in true British tradition.

The curriculum offered also encouraged Sharda's fondness for sports and she began to represent the school in inter-school

competitions of basketball and badminton, winning laurels by defeating the robust English and Anglo-Indian girls of the neighbouring Cathedral and John Connon School. The pleasure in winning against these sturdy specimens was doubled by the fact that it happened all too seldom and few of the traditionally brought-up Gujarati girls were willing to indulge in such "unladylike" pursuits!

Going to school was an experience in those days, almost like setting out on a journey every morning. The Setalvad girls carried red earthen pots filled with water to last them through the school day and large, sturdy aluminium boxes containing their "tiffin", the afternoon meal. Plastic was still a commodity of the future and the heavy containers of food and drink would be set down from the carriage and in the afternoon, when school was over and their contents had been duly consumed, the girls would walk from school, carrying them, to Chimanlal's office opposite the Rajabai Clock Tower. Escorted by Chimanlal's long-time stalwart peon, Govind, they would go down the street, all the way past the sprawling expanse of the *maidan* (playing field) to Chimanlal's chambers. An afternoon snack of tea and biscuits would be eaten there and then the father and daughters would go home together in the landau drawn by the prancing red Australian stallion.

The hours spent in Chimanlal's presence were precious to Sharda. As a very little girl, ensconced almost invisibly in a corner, she would watch with awe as her father conferred with clients and political peers and observe him conduct his affairs in a dignified and straightforward manner. As she grew older, she began to imitate his gestures, his manner of speaking, the steely-eyed look he employed when he wished to drive a point home. The thin gangly child would go home and practise the "Chimanlal manner" before the long mirror in her room, little knowing that she would one day address her family, colleagues and subordinates with the same mannerisms.

She learnt the quality of patience in those long hours of waiting in her father's office and understood that in life all was not at her beck and call to suit her convenience. To travel from the Fort area to Nepean Sea Road in those days took the better part of an hour by horse-carriage and it was impractical to do the trip to and fro more than once a day. The girls enjoyed the rides in the landau driven by Chimanlal's faithful retainer, Gopal. He would drive the carriage at a rollicking speed and Sharda would cheer excitedly. Gopal loved and looked after the stallion as though it were his own child. In the

hot and humid Bombay night he would bring him out of the stables and walk him in the compound near the side of the house that faced the sea because he felt that the horse could not bear the sticky heat of the Indian summer -- after all, the animal had come all the way from Australia! Late at night the children would lie half-awake listening to the faint but reassuring sound of the horse's hooves as Gopal walked him up and down to cool him off in the gentle breeze blowing from the ocean.

Bombay was different then -- Marine Drive did not exist, the reclaimed area and streets extended only up to the present Queen's Road. Beyond that lay the railway track and the sea. Churchgate Station stood like a sentinel between the sea and the bustling Fort area -- trains started at Colaba Station and chugged via Churchgate Station to Grant Road. There was a rusty iron gate at Churchgate Station that creaked protestingly as one stepped through it onto the sands of the seashore.

Education came to Sharda not merely in the form of book learning but also in terms of the discipline and lively conversations that were a typical feature of the Setalvad home. It was said of Chimanlal that he always expressed himself in a low, well-modulated voice which was never allowed to rise above its normal pitch even when he was severely provoked -- such was the degree of self-discipline he had imposed on himself. When in court, he was quoted as adopting "a gentle, persuasive manner like that of a kind teacher with a child pupil"²⁹; he would treat his opponents with the same gentleness and his manner would kill with kindness but once having killed would not gloat over the corpse. The same was true of his behaviour with his children -- quiet but effective.

The late afternoon rays of the sun framed the scene in the Setalvad drawing room one Saturday afternoon. Sharda and a friend chased each other around the elegantly grouped furniture, shrieking with delight as they escaped each other's clutches. Suddenly, Sharda tripped and her flailing arm clutched desperately at a table for support. The precious, antique Chinese porcelain vase on the table the child had gripped, teetered. Dazed, Sharda watched helplessly as it toppled onto the floor and broke. Hearing the crash, Krishnagauri came to investigate its cause and seeing the vase lying on the floor, admonished Sharda severely, ending on a threatening note of -- "Wait until your father hears about this!" A servant was called in to pick up the pieces and Sharda watched miserably, a cold ache of fear

beginning to spread through her initial numbness as she thought of what her father would say and do when he returned home. She curled up on a windowsill for what seemed like hours, waiting for the moment when the person she looked up to most in her tiny world would enter and see what her carelessness had wrought. Chimanlal came home, sat down to eat his dinner as was his habit and finished his meal leisurely. If he noticed Sharda's absence he did not remark on it, pausing after his meal only to nod reflectively when his wife reported the mishap. Sharda looked up apprehensively when he entered the drawing room but he did not look in her direction. Calling for the servant who had picked up the broken vase he directed that the two pieces -- fortunately it had not cracked into small shards -- be joined together in such a way that the front appeared to be unbroken and the crack faced the wall. When this was done he looked at his daughter for a long moment without uttering a word of reproach. For the child, the agonizing wait in anticipation of his wrath and the subsequent silence were much worse than any voluble reproach would have been and the punishment hit home harder than any severe scolding would have done.

Other lessons were learnt in school -- an oral history examination was held and conducted by a professor from the Sydenham College, Mr. Kaji. The students answered the questions posed to them rapidly until the girl sharing Sharda's table was asked a particular date. Believing she was doing a kind deed by helping out a classmate, Sharda prompted her in the sudden quiet that followed the girl's inability to reply and having done so, thought nothing further of the matter. The results were submitted -- and at the morning assembly the following day, disaster struck the unaware Sharda. The principal called out: "Miss Setalvad, come up and stand near me!" Puzzled, Sharda did as she was bid and stood facing the rest of the school from the stage. Addressing the assembled pupils, Mrs. Stuart announced: "This is the girl who prompted her friend in the oral history examination and brought shame to our school and to her noble family." Sharda was aghast at the severity of her punishment. To be reprimanded and disgraced before the entire school! But it taught her that in life she could not act impulsively and do wrong in the misguided belief that it would help another.

On another occasion later in the year her class teacher was absent from school. The classroom windows overlooked a side street. Some of the more daring girls stood up on the benches and

began to dance and sing, creating quite a stir and attracting disapproving looks from some passers-by. Oblivious of the attention their merriment had drawn, the girls pranced about until they were shocked into silence as the door of the classroom was flung open and they encountered Mrs. Stuart's cold stare. Some of the more orthodox-minded Parsi pedestrians had irately reported the incident to her and the culprits stood with their heads downcast as she berated them scathingly for their lack of decorum and irresponsible behaviour. "A true lady is always aware of her every action and is expected to behave at all times as though she were on stage and a thousand pairs of eyes were observing her every move and gesture." Little did she know the impact her words would have on at least one young person in the group -- her advice would stand Sharda in good stead on the various occasions when she would be called upon to address others and be the focus of their attention.

A tiny terrace on the third floor of the school led up to the roof. Kusum and her friends would sometimes allow Sharda to join them and clamber up the steps during the interval between classes. They would sit on the sun-warmed tiles, enjoying the mild breeze blowing in their faces at that great height, look down on midget-sized passersby on the street below and giggle contentedly as they swapped stories of classroom adventures. Many a tile broke under the weight of the sturdy youngsters and based on reports by the school's maintenance crew Mrs. Stuart regularly conducted serious enquiries into the cause for the damage. Not till they passed out of school did the culprits divulge their guilty secret!

In a home with six children there were bound to be outbursts of mischief and practical pranks. The Setalvad youngsters were no exception. Many were the tricks played on unsuspecting siblings and cousins and hapless members of the staff. There was the time when the white mice were taken from their hutch in the garden and given the run of the house -- it was unfortunate that an elderly dowager aunt happened to be visiting Krishnagauri and the terrified mice decided to seek shelter in the voluminous folds of her sari as she sat sedately sipping tea in the drawing room.

Chuckles at her hysterical outburst were hastily subdued as those responsible for the old lady's discomfort were regarded balefully by their mother. Or there was the rainy afternoon when it was decided to "toast" chapatis on a badminton racquet held against the ancient and rusty boiler -- as Sharda ruefully tried to explain later: "We

didn't want to trouble the cook to make them for us so we decided to cook them ourselves!" The charred morsels of chapati and the blackened racquet were both consigned to the rubbish heap and an earnest promise extracted from the youngest member of the Setalvad household that she restrict her attempts at "cooking" to the confines of the kitchen.

Generally, the older children would bully the younger ones but Sharda gleefully got her own back on one occasion. Lessons had not been completed as Motilal, who acted the role of the patriarch in all seriousness, would have wished and he decided some punishment was in order. He lined up the younger children and began to lecture them. Sharda ran halfway up the stairs and taunted him: "I've done my work, so why are you punishing me?" He followed her and tried to slap her on the thigh but she moved away agilely and his hand hit the banister hard instead. Sharda laughed out loud and cried: "That's what happens when you try to hit somebody and hurt them -- see, now you are hurt and have been punished instead!" The next day Motilal's fingers had blue bruises on them and Sharda trod warily, making sure she kept out of his way until the grim look disappeared from his face.

From a very young age she was sensitive yet forthright and always spoke her mind. Even as a child she loved to imitate Chimanlal and make "speeches", venture her own opinions and share in the adult discussions that her family engaged in. She was alert and interested in all that went on in the world around her and always displayed a grave dignity, touching in one so young and innocent. Serious like her father and with a certain element of reserve, she had an unconsciously regal posture and an attitude of knowing exactly where she was going and what she would do when she got there. Unlike the warm-hearted and jovial Jivanlal, her second-oldest brother, who grew up to be a genius in the world of insurance and was nominated by the Government of India in 1937 to the Advisory Committee on Insurance Law or the bubbly, extrovert Kusum, Sharda was always very aware of what she was aiming for in life and how she would set about achieving her goals.

Life on the home front was marked by historical milestones and achievements. The active and prominent part played by their father on the legal and political front was eagerly discussed by the children and Sharda, despite being the youngest, would display an avid interest in all that was happening around her. In 1915, Chimanlal was

elected a member of the Imperial Legislative Council. This necessitated frequent absences from home as he had to travel to Simla and Delhi for meetings and conferences. Sharda would look forward to his return home and shyly question him as to his experiences during his travels. Her quick and eager young mind would grasp the essentials of his reports and it would seem to her, whilst listening to the vivid narrative, that she had herself been present at the meetings he had attended and heard the decisions being made and the judgments delivered. Chimanlal would smile indulgently at the excited little face turned up to him and with kindly amusement indulge her interest in both his political and legal career. Some months after his appointment, seeing the sustained extent of her involvement and persuaded by Jivanlal who was always Sharda's ally, he decided to have her accompany him on one of his visits to Simla when the Council met there.

Sharda was thrilled at the prospect. She, the littlest of the Setalvads, had been chosen by Papa to accompany him on such an important occasion! For the next few days she flew from one corner of the house to the other in bursts of frenzied activity, begging Krishnagauri to make sure that her clothes were properly packed and that nothing had been forgotten. She held her breath in anticipation of the day they were to leave, hoping desperately that nothing would occur to change the plans being made. The momentous day dawned at last and she clutched her arms about herself in sheer joy as they were driven off to the station, helped on board the train and waved off -- at last! Hardly able to contain her excitement during the long train journey to Simla and fascinated by the quaint little hill station itself on their arrival, she nevertheless managed to present a quiet and sedate front as she walked into the Cecil Hotel with Chimanlal.

The suite allotted to the Setalvads was in one corner of a quiet wing and faced another which was occupied by the brilliant Muslim lawyer, M.A. Jinnah³⁰ and his beautiful, young Parsi wife, Ruttie, daughter of Sir Dinshaw Petit. Sharda, who was at a gangly adolescent stage herself, was fascinated by her first glimpse of this vision of loveliness. The graceful and elegantly attired Ruttie wafted past on a drift of exotic perfume, leaving the young girl in the doorway opposite to stare almost disbelievingly in her wake. Sharda's eyes opened even wider when she saw the tailor sitting outside the door of the Jinnah suite that afternoon -- the tremendously fashion-

conscious Mrs. Jinnah wore different saris every day and the tailor was constantly summoned to run up matching accessories for her. She was the talk of the town when she took her daily walk on the Mall, clad in shockingly low-cut and open-backed blouses that were seemingly impossibly held together by only three tiny buttons! For the more conservatively brought-up Sharda, she was an eye-opener indeed!

The ladies accompanying the members of the Council were permitted to sit in the gallery during the Viceroy's session. Sharda watched with keen interest as one after another, eminent personalities took the floor and addressed the gathering. She heard the speeches made by Motilal Nehru³¹, Jinnah, Vithalbhai Patel³² and her father. She saw these dynamic men at their best. The visit to Simla had a tremendous impact on the young girl as it impressed on her the depth of involvement these men had decided on at the cost of their personal lives. She returned home and quietly reflected on all that she had seen and heard.

In 1916, Chimanlal achieved tremendous success when the Hindu Disposition of Property Act was granted inclusion in the Statute Book by the Governor-General of India. In 1917 he was elected Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University. 1918 saw him elected as a member of the Southborough Committee constituted to decide on the reserved and transferred subjects under what were popularly known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

In 1919 occurred the Jallianwala Bagh disaster. In the space of ten ghastly minutes, General Dyer's troops fired incessantly and indiscriminately at thousands of hapless people who had met together to stage a peaceful protest in a walled park whose only access and exit was through one narrow lane. The fusillade of shots killed hundreds outright and left others lying on the dusty ground, their life-blood soaking its earthen hue with eerie splotches of dark crimson. Chimanlal was appointed a member of the investigation committee drawn up under the presidentship of Lord Hunter, the Solicitor-General for Scotland. All Chimanlal's legal acumen was called upon and all his reserves of courage and conviction depleted to ensure that the guilt of those responsible for the inhuman slaughter of innocent people was proved. A majority report was drafted by Lord Hunter and his European colleagues; Chimanlal and the other Indian members signed the minority report, the draftsmanship of which was almost entirely to Chimanlal's credit. A complete

disagreement and break in communication ensued and Chimanlal was reported to have said: "Well sir, you may write your own report and we shall write ours".³³

Small wonder that the seeds of ethics and principles and the courage to fight and defend the right cause were sown in his young sixteen year old daughter. In later years she too would have to fight her own battles and determine in her own mind the morals of the decisions she would be called upon to make. Long years later, it would be said of her: "There were things she did not want to do but did because it was right to do them and others which she staunchly refused to do because there was always this very clear-cut compartment in her mind which very sharply and clearly categorized the trifles on which you give in and the matters of principle which mean much to you and on which you do not succumb. And if you show that strength of character, people begin to appreciate and respect it."³⁴

In the meantime, however, Sharda was creating history in her own little world and marking it with the first important milestone in her young life. In 1919 a new record in scholastic achievement was set in the Alexandra Girls' Institute - the annual report read as follows: "Sharda Chimanlal Setalvad scored the remarkable distinction of winning both the Avabai Bhownagree Memorial Silver Medal for the highest total as well as the Bai C. Jeevanjee Memorial Gold Medal for the highest marks in English and the Sitabai Laxmanrao Vaidya Memorial Prize for the highest marks in mathematics."

Fifty-four years later, a hush fell over the rows of whispering schoolgirls as the chief guest at the school's prize-giving function was escorted to the dais. They watched in awe as the slim white-haired figure sat erect on her seat and looked down at them with an encouraging smile. They listened to the student addressing her: "On a day in 1919, on an occasion similar to this one, perhaps in the very same compound, a young Alexandrian, Miss Sharda Setalvad, received two medals, one gold and one silver. On a day fifty-four years later, the very same person is back again at the Alexandra School. There is only one difference. She is bestowing the medals gold and silver, the scholarships, books and trophies. As she stands in our midst, we will all bask in reflected glory in the years that she has been away. She has distinguished herself as the first Gujarati lady to take the M.A. degree and as a social worker. She has become a very effective educationist as the Registrar, Dean and at present the Vice-Chancellor of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey

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22 *Educating the Indian Woman*

Women's University, Bombay. As we glory in her achievements, so we glory in her presence amongst us today at the school's most important function, the prize distribution. We hope, as the girls file past, she will be visualising in her mind, many other days when she was just one of us."

The smile on the older, wiser Sharda's face broadened and a mischievous twinkle lit up her eyes as she recalled the beaming naive child who had collected her armful of prizes and dreamt of achievements that still lay in the far distant future. In that moment had come the time for the little schoolgirl to move on, to encounter new challenges and to walk the path that would lead her to receive the accolades destined to come her way.

The Young Dreamer, 1919-1920

Transcending Tradition -- The Indian Woman at University

"Don't be content to be a housewife; don't be content to think only of manners and charm and dilettantish conversation; don't be content to have your mind and personality obliterated by marriage or social norms. Prepare yourself, develop your thinking powers, grow accustomed to conflict and the clash of ideas. Then when you grow up you will be able to make a contribution to the society in which you live, you will never weaken in the face of personal warfare."³⁵

School was over -- what next? The future path had already been mapped out for the sixteen year old for whom the conventional lot of marriage and motherhood alone would never suffice or be enough of a fulfilment in itself. It was decided that Sharda would join the Wilson College and study for a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Economics.

She entered the portals of the college to discover that she was the only female student in the history and economics classes. The ratio of men and women students in the college was absurdly disproportionate. Not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century had higher education for women begun to be accepted in principle and girls enrolled in colleges. At the time of Sharda's admission, most of the young men at university still firmly believed that higher education was an exclusively male province and that women had no place there. Some even did all they could to harass the female complement in their classes in the hope that they would become discouraged and leave. In the English class compulsory to the course, Sharda and the few other girls present were subjected to various outbursts of petty

nastiness from one of their co-students. The young man in question would, for example, paint the bench on which they sat with dry chalk so that when they sat on it wearing the regulation dark-coloured sarees or dresses, intended to avoid drawing undue attention to their presence, their clothes would be streaked with the white powdery substance. At other times he would sit immediately behind the girls and make abusive remarks and leer at them. As the days passed, Sharda's patience wore thin. She had come to acquire knowledge in this institution and she would not be distracted by an egoistic male! She waited for a suitable opportunity during the next English lecture and unfazed by his lecherous remark told him audibly that she was thankful for his concern for her well-being but that he would take his good advice elsewhere if he knew what was good for him!

John Mackenzie was the principal of the Wilson College. His wife, a dour Scotswoman, was an orthodox conformist and a true "stiff upper-lipped" lady who ran a tight ship as far as the college hostel was concerned. She was, in many respects, more orthodox than the Hindu mothers of many of her husband's students. She insisted on the "heathen" students having compulsory Bible classes and protested strongly against the male and female students indulging in "mixed" sports' activities. Sharda, who enjoyed sports immensely and who was totally uninhibited in comparison with the other, in this respect, more conventional and staid young women of her class, used to play ping-pong and badminton and had just started learning tennis. Despite the disapproving frowns directed her way by Mrs. Mackenzie who believed firmly that a young Hindu girl with Sharda's background should exhibit a quietly unobtrusive and gentle manner and not put herself on "public display competing against young gentlemen on the playing field" she persevered and became the college champion for badminton, representing the college colours against the Elphinstone College and the Medical College in inter-collegiate tournaments playing, dressed not in short skirts, which would have been considered truly outrageous, but in a sari! Kusum and Venkatrao were also Wilsonians but lacked the daring spirit that their youngest sibling displayed in demanding that women be allowed to play in mixed events with their male co-students. Sharda found a sympathetic ally in the Chairman of the Gymkhana Committee, Professor Kellock and enlisted his support in her "fight for the right of women to be allowed to participate in sports' events and partner men in the same". She succeeded in her little crusade

and found enough enthusiastic supporters to get herself voted a member of the Gymkhana Committee -- thereafter, it was smooth sailing or rather playing!

One afternoon, Sharda had obtained permission to play a badminton match partnering her brother against the Medical College team. However, the permission, despite her persuasive appeals, was granted so late in the day that there was scarcely any time left for her to return home and change into her sports' shoes. Moreover she was afraid that if she did go home she would not be allowed to come back to the college and play her match as her sister-in-law was not well and might require her company at home. To an eager sixteen year old who had just won a feisty battle against the "male-oriented" college administration this presented a serious dilemma indeed! Finally, with a toss of her head in true Sharda spirit, she opted not to go home to change her shoes but played in the flat leather sandals she had on instead -- and won!

College was not all fun and games and play -- serious work was done on the side and here too, Sharda displayed an interest and intensity equal to that displayed by her in fighting for women's rights in the college as far as sports and general activities were concerned. Her practical nature was revealed in the answer papers she submitted which were quoted as examples of "brevity and accurate relevance". Her strongest rival for examination honours was a Mr. Bharucha. The two of them used to alternate between the first and second positions in the history section but it was an amicable rivalry involving the frequent exchange of notes and ideas.

A popular student, Sharda shed much of her reserve during this first year of college. Rubbing shoulders with her co-students who came from varied social strata and backgrounds sometimes totally dissimilar to her own helped her to see others in a different light and cracked the protective shell she had worn during her schooldays. At college she met other young men and women of an equal level in that their quest for further knowledge was common. They all had hopes and aspirations to create a better world for themselves, to cast off traditional inhibitions and orthodox manners. Kusum and Sharda were the first of their family's women to pursue higher, formal education. There were other young women in college who too were making a break from the social structure they had inherited and hoping, by their bold initiative, to carve new niches for their sex.

It was a time of new beginnings. The Indian woman was at last

entering hitherto "forbidden" territory that had been the exclusive preserve of the male sex. A whole new world was opening up for her. She was growing to learn and understand that her intelligence was no less than a man's and that she was by no means a "mentally inferior" being. There were choices, options, alternatives for her to seek and exploit. This was a generation of strong and courageous individuals who chose to control their own destiny, creating a new role and concept for themselves. They dared to transcend traditionally imposed limits for they were not willing to live out their lives as daughters, wives and mothers alone. Through education they gained access to the varied life-styles, attitudes, value and belief systems of a much larger group of people. They had opted to travel through uncharted terrain. The road they traversed was unknown and lonely. These young women, groping to find a sense of identity in an environment of countless social musts, shoulds and oughts were restrained at every step in their search for freedom but hope was theirs and it reinforced their inherent resilience.

They were the young dreamers of their time, certain only of the fact that it would somehow be possible to make their youthful dreams come true in the face of social opposition. Demurely clad in dark saris, heads covered by their palav (sari border) they stormed the bastions of university education, staking their claim in what had previously been a completely male-dominated domain.

At home, life followed a more or less set pattern. Sharda's days were consumed by her studies, her passion for sports and the moments she most looked forward to -- the evening hours when the whole Setalvad clan gathered together for the evening meal and exchanged lively narratives of each member's activities and experiences. The family had grown -- Motilal was married and had a baby daughter. Padma, long married and mother of a daughter and a son, was not often home with her family but nonetheless managed to visit them fairly regularly. Venkatrao and Jivanlal remained staunch bachelors, for the time being showing no interest in marriage. Kusum and Sharda, the youngest of the brood, innocent and still somewhat shy, giggled together as teenagers and shared whispered confidences late at night when the rest of the household slept, fantasizing about the young men they were introduced to. Kusum and Sharda were inseparable companions, the closest of friends and confidantes. Each was certain that nothing and nobody could breach that closeness ever.

"Watch me, I'm sure I can skip faster and for longer than you!" Sharda called out, energetically wielding the long skipping rope she held in both hands, her slim, wiry frame displaying a vigour that her slightly plumper sister could not hope to match. The late afternoon shadows were beginning to fall on the lawn where Kusum sat on the swing, idly looking about her and Sharda skipped, unleashing pent-up energy. So engrossed was she that she did not hear the slight creak of the little wicket-gate just behind her and skipped backwards, bumping straight into the tall young man who had entered quietly. Startled, she stood still for a moment, looking at him openly. Her first impressions were: "He has such a kind and gentle expression on his face and it's a so much better looking face than those that I've been seeing!" Then, suddenly aware that she was staring, she dropped her eyes in confusion, stuttered an apology and looked away. The young man in his turn looked amusedly at this slender young woman who had stared at him so frankly and unabashedly with her clear gaze and whose shoulder his hand still rested on where it had gone instinctively to support her as she skipped into him. Removing his hand, he nodded slightly and walked on into the house. Sharda still stood dumbly, not quite sure of what had just transpired but somehow instinctively certain that her life had, in that brief eclipse of time moved on from girlhood to womanhood. She looked about her as though to reassure herself that the world was still the same place it had been a moment ago -- Kusum still rocked gently on the swing, unaware of the tense drama that had been enacted between her little sister and their visitor, the shadows were only a little longer than they had been, the surf still murmured unceasingly as it beat on the rocks below the garden. And yet, for Sharda, it was all different. A feeling of great joy suffused her whole being and she wondered: "What can this mean?"

Suddenly her whole life had changed and taken on a new dimension. It was no longer enough to live out her days in peaceful contentment, dividing them between learning and play and family. It was no longer enough to go to college and come home and engage in childish banter with Kusum -- and this, this was one secret she felt she could not share even with Kusum just yet. At least not until she had understood it for herself. Always quietly content, she now burned with an impatience she could not fully comprehend. She warred with herself unceasingly -- how could she, a self-contained individual suddenly feel this illogical wanting and needing after only

the briefest of encounters? Worse, did this mean that all the rigid self-discipline she had imposed on herself over the years was no longer in her control, that she was no longer "in charge" of herself? And yet, it all felt so right, so logical, so inevitable a conclusion to all she had been dreaming and fantasizing about in the past year. Who was he, this object of her fantasies? How could she find out more about him?

Tradition dictated that young women not appear over-eager to discuss young men. Although the Setalvads were more liberal than most Gujarati families and encouraged open discussion, this was hardly the sort of topic that could be considered permissible at dinnertime when the family met and ate together. Sharda thought of the bombshell effect such a question on her part would provoke and giggled a little hysterically to herself before deciding on a safe course of action. Discreet, carefully posed questions to various members of the household revealed that the stranger she had encountered was a friend of her cousin, Bakubhai,³⁶ who lived with them. Her next bold step was to tackle Bakubhai and find out what she could, firsthand. She arranged to catch him alone for a moment and in a tone of feigned casualness posed the question that had been burning uppermost in her mind: "Who was that young man who came to meet you here the other evening?" Bakubhai, who had never known Sharda to evince even a flicker of interest in the constant stream of young men who visited the Setalvad home or those she encountered at college was somewhat taken aback by her interest in his friend. Unwilling to pander to this unconventional curiosities on her part he answered merely: "His name is Baburao Divan and he is studying law at the St. Xavier's College". Sharda's enquiry was then duly reported by him to Chimanlal and Krishnagauri who received it with different reactions -- Chimanlal, a little startled by the realization that his little Sharda was already so grown-up and unwilling to acknowledge to himself that his youngest fledgling was poised to leave the nest and Krishnagauri, a smile glimmering at the corners of her mouth, pleased that her tomboyish youngest daughter was at last becoming conscious of her femininity and proud of the discerning choice she had made, a choice that Chimanlal and she would be happy to encourage. Knowing that the meagre scrap of information imparted by Bakubhai would in no way satisfy her daughter's curiosity she later added: "His father is Jivanlal Divan,³⁷ a well-known and respected educationist in Ahmedabad. He runs a proprietary school

there and the son intends to complete his studies in law here in Bombay." Then she adroitly turned the conversation to other, mundane matters. Sharda sat, quietly hugging the information that had just come her way to herself. Now "he" had a name and a background, one acceptable to her family it seemed, thank goodness! She spent the rest of the evening in a daze, mumbling monosyllabic answers when addressed and didn't even hear Kusum calling out to her afterwards to come for a walk in the garden. Walking up to her room, she curled up on the windowsill and looked out on to the waves as they gleamed in the moonlight. She thought for a long time and then, as though having made an important decision within herself, she smiled a secret little smile and prepared for bed.

Baburao came often to the Setalvad home. If he was aware of the manner in which Sharda contrived to be around when he came, to her chagrin he gave no sign of it. He would come, talk and exchange pleasantries with whichever member of the family happened to be there, partake of the cup of tea or glass of fruit drink offered and return, whistling merrily, to the college hostel. Sharda found these occasional visits extremely frustrating, not least for the fact that this young man seemed to be almost unaware of her -- an attitude she was not accustomed to in any of the other young men of her acquaintance or her brothers' friends, some of whom were almost pathetic in their efforts to make an impression on the eligible Setalvad girls -- and merely treated her with the polite deference due to the youngest daughter of a household that offered him hospitality because his family was known to hers. Irked, she determined to "make" him notice her and to this end would come and sit demurely in the drawing room when he visited her home or try to catch an occasional glimpse of him when the college teams used to play against each other on the expanses of the great *maidan* in the Fort area of Bombay.

What she didn't know was that her transparent ploys were totally unnecessary -- Baburao had been captivated by this young woman when he first set eyes on her and had suffered no lesser agonies of mind and spirit, deliberating on how he could go about meeting and courting her as the times demanded and continue to visit the Setalvads more often without outlasting his welcome there. The two young people went about their daily routine, absorbed in thoughts of each other, not realising that what they felt was shared by both.

Matters came to a head when Baburao returned home to

Ahmedabad for the holidays. Always forthright, he broached the subject of "his" young lady on his first evening home. His father, Jivanlal, a quiet, soft-spoken man, listened to his son's impassioned declaration and then asked him gently: "The Setalvads are a very affluent and well-to-do family. Chimanlal is a Liberal and a reputed and influential man in the circles that matter. From what you have told me, the young woman appears to know her own mind very strongly -- if you feel that you can look after her in the manner to which she has been accustomed and keep her happy, I have no objection to your bringing her into our home as your bride." His confidence in himself unshaken, Baburao reaffirmed the decision he had already made but which he had expressed out of respect and deference for his father and returned to Bombay at the end of the holidays, prepared to speak to Chimanlal.

Jivanlal too, wrote to Chimanlal and Krishnagauri, welcoming their daughter into the Divan household and expressing his approval of his son's decision. The two families concurred and the news that she could now consider herself officially "betrothed" was broken to an ecstatic Sharda.

The Divans were an old and respected family in Ahmedabad. Descendants of Raja Todar Mal, the Mughal Emperor Akbar's revenue minister, they too had come to Ahmedabad from the Punjab many generations earlier and belonged to the same social class of *brahma-kshatriyas* as the Setalvads. But whereas Chimanlal had adopted the attitudes of a staunch Liberal and believed in fighting India's war for independence on strictly legal and constitutional terms, Jivanlal was a firm Gandhian who believed strongly in self-sacrifice, simple standards of living and the principle of "satyagraha" or passive resistance advocated by Gandhi.³⁸ A quiet and learned man, he ran the Divan Proprietary High School founded by him in Ahmedabad.

In 1919, as Baburao and Sharda's feelings for each other took root and the first tendrils of their deep and abiding love began to unfurl, the National Movement was becoming stronger and Jivanlal joined Gandhi in his protest against the passing of the Rowlatt Bills by the British Government. Although widely divergent in their political ideologies and beliefs, both Chimanlal and Jivanlal, stalwarts that they were, worked in their own ways for India and wove their respective sacrifices into the fabric of their own and their children's lives,

creating an awareness and deep-lasting impression that would mark their entire future. Both believed in preserving the roots of their heritage and yet both adapted their manner of thinking to suit the need of the times. They pursued their beliefs, firm in the conviction that they would see the goals they had set themselves, through.

Enjoying the status of a young lady engaged to be married, Sharda lived out that year in heady abandon, working hard but living for the brief moments when Baburao and she could meet and be together. Although his parents had bestowed their approval, Motilal, who still looked on Sharda as his 'baby sister' played the role of strict chaperon to the hilt as he could not decide whether they should be permitted the liberty of meeting and being together or not. Unknown to Sharda, he had one morning intercepted a note sent to her by Baburao and had not quite made up his mind to hand it over to her. Certainly in his time, young people did not send each other missives but went through the proper channels of communication, most often an older member of the family. What kind of a relationship was his headstrong little sister plunging herself into? And what kind of a young man was this fiance of hers, boldly sending letters to her in the middle of the day? Shaking his head in disapproval he put the note away unread, undecided as to what to do with it for the moment, and went about his interrupted business, promptly proceeding to forget about the missive. An evening walk at the Hanging Gardens had been planned for that day and the family had congregated on the front porch waiting for Kusum and Sharda to join them. Sharda ran out and then stopped short in surprise as she saw Baburao coming up the drive towards them, obviously not expecting her to be going out. The confusion was later unravelled. In his note, Baburao had informed Sharda that he would be calling on her at about six o'clock that evening -- unfortunately, Motilal in his preoccupation had completely forgotten about the wretched note and had not told Sharda about it! Faced with Baburao's unexpected arrival he decided that for the moment discretion was called for and the family, including Sharda and Baburao went for the evening "constitutional" as scheduled. That evening Motilal came into Sharda's room and handed her the note, saying simply that he had not been able to decide on whether such "permissive" behaviour should be allowed or not!

While exciting preparations for Sharda's impending marriage were under way, other more unpleasant events were taking place on

the national front. General Dyer's massacre of the innocent at Jallianwala Bagh had left a bitter taste in the mouths of both the Indians and the British. Exhausted from his arduous work on the Hunter Committee's report, Chimanlal returned to Bombay from Delhi, weary in both body and spirit. He needed to recuperate and it was felt that a change of climate would be beneficial to his health. Unwilling to leave his family after such a long absence from home he asked Sharda to accompany him and they travelled up to the hill station of Mahableshwar for a brief holiday, their last time together as it transpired, before her marriage. It was a time of quiet solitude, of reflection, of shared conversations and thoughts that would be treasured memories in the years to come, precious fragments of happiness to recall from the recesses of the mind and hold on to in times of strife and heartbreak.

And it was here, in Mahableshwar, that fate set in motion the other wheel of Sharda's future. As Chimanlal and she were out walking one evening he pointed out a couple riding on horseback some distance away. The man was much older than his companion who seemed to be little more than a girl. "That is Lady Thackersey",³⁹ said Chimanlal, "a young woman to be admired, for without any formal higher or secondary education she has achieved a great deal. A courageous and determined lady indeed." Sharda looked and listened dutifully, little realising the tremendous impact the lady would someday have on her own life and how her future association with her would take her to the pinnacle of her own success. The Setalvads passed the Thackerseys, Chimanlal raised his hat in greeting and they walked on. The brief interlude was soon forgotten by Sharda and would not surface in her mind until many years later. Father and daughter made the most of their holiday together and all too soon it was time to return to Bombay.

Sharda had not yet had occasion to meet Baburao's family. In Ahmedabad, two days before the marriage, she was invited to visit her future in-laws. A luncheon was arranged by the Divans at which the family would meet the young woman chosen by their son to be his bride. Ahmedabad was still an "outpost" steeped in orthodox tradition compared to the cosmopolitan Bombay Sharda had grown up in and the Divan women, Sharda's future mother- and grandmother-in-law (Jivanlal's mother) were not the emancipated equivalent of their Setalvad counterparts. Accompanied by her aunt, Sharda went to this first meeting nervous and unsure of the

behaviour expected of her. How was she to even recognise the various members of the Divan household whom she had not so much as laid eyes on! This obstacle was overcome by someone calling out to Baburao's mother "Chaturlaxmi!"⁴⁰ as they entered so that Sharda was easily able to identify her. Jivanlal, a kindly figure with Baburao's twinkling eyes, welcomed her and put her at ease. Later, Sharda would learn how this gentle old man had "taken her side" once Baburao had announced his intention of marrying her.

In accordance with the tradition of those times, husbands did not address their wives by their first names but alluded to them as mothers of their children. Jivanlal, knowing that Baburao would not adhere to this custom decided to make it easier for his son and young daughter-in-law by setting a precedent. One day, after their betrothal had been formally announced, he suddenly called out to his wife "Chaturlaxmi!", thereby provoking a storm of protest and accusations of "unseemly and ungentlemanly" behaviour. Indeed, even his mother flooded him with a stream of harsh invective to which he calmly responded by saying: "When Baburao brings his bride home to live with us he will call her by her first name, Sharda, for that is the way things are done by today's generation. I want no protest from either of you when that happens and have therefore decided that in order to accustom you to this new habit I shall henceforth also address Chaturlaxmi by her given name!" The ladies argued strongly but to no avail and shook their heads in resignation at his adamant statement. It was a small gesture but Sharda, when she heard about it, would be secure in the knowledge that she had an "ally" in her new home.

Meanwhile, the young dreamer dreamed of the future she would share with the handsome young man she had found and with whose support she would build their life together. They talked of their hopes and dreams and ambitions, they talked of what they would do for India and her people, their families, their friends. They walked hand in hand on the lawns of Sharda's home where they could be together, chaperoned yet undisturbed, and they knew with a deep-rooted conviction that whatever the future may hold in store for them they would be able to face together what each could not have done alone.

3

In Search of Destiny, 1920-1936

Education and independence are every woman's birthright

"When a young woman breaks all the unspoken taboos of an oppressive society, she is looked at askance. When deviance becomes the norm, and she grows old and wise while being quietly rebellious, she is considered worthy of the greatest honours."⁴¹

April 30th, 1920 -- the day she had dreamed of for ever, it seemed, had arrived at last. In the morning, Baburao and his family arrived in a long procession. In traditional style, Sharda was made to sit in a closed palanquin and led to the marriage ceremony by her maternal uncle. As normally the bride and bridegroom would not have seen each other before the actual wedding, the bride's face was covered with the richly-brocaded border of her sari. Tendrils of smoke from the ceremonial fire wafted upwards on the cool morning breeze, the sound of ritual chanting filled the air and ancient verses vibrated in the atmosphere, solemnising the union of Baburao and Sharda as they were promised to each other for the rest of their earthly lives.... "walk with me four steps and three; I seek thy hand, let me not break from thee; heaven and earth are me and thee, seed am I for thee to bloom; hymn and verse are thee and me; word and mind are me and thee; be my friend and make me groom; come, my mate and merge with me"....for an eternal instant they looked into each other's eyes, mirrors of each other's souls.

This marriage would be a tempestuous one for the two people involved were both strong personalities. It would have its share of joy and sorrow, of laughter and tears. Each would support the other, the

one sometimes more, the other sometimes less. Their years together would demand sacrifice and giving to an extent as yet undreamt of, fate would deal them cruel blows and great loss but it would also give them more than most other people received in a lifetime -- it would make of each a greater human being in his or her own way.

In keeping with his "modern" beliefs, Jivanlal refused to accept the commonly expected "dowry" from the Setalvads. In those days, a sum of five thousand rupees (an immense amount in view of the rupee's value then) was the wealth conferred on an educated bridegroom. In addition, various "gifts" were expected to be given to the bride's in-laws as they were "accepting" the girl into their family. A reformist, Jivanlal refused to accept any form of gift, monetary or otherwise. Chimanlal too made a break from tradition -- he did not host the customary "caste" dinner to which all the members of the "brahmakshatriya" caste connected to the Divan and Setalvad families should, by social dictate, have been invited. It was an archaic norm and no longer practical to carry out. Chimanlal's non-conformist attitude was perhaps made more palatable to the family members on both sides as he was still suffering the ill-health brought on by the rigours of his work on the Hunter Committee's report and it was believed that the dinner had been cancelled on account of his not feeling well.

There was no "honeymoon" for the young couple. Once the marriage ceremony was over and the festivities done with, Sharda continued to live with her family in the Setalvad mansion as Baburao had no home in Bombay and was living in the college residency. She carried on with her studies for her university degree and Baburao pursued his study of law. It was only when vacation time came around and the colleges closed for the holidays that the young people went to Baburao's parents' home in Ahmedabad for the duration of the break.

Sharda was thrust in at the deep end on her arrival in Ahmedabad. She who had practically never had to lift a finger and whose every basic need had been anticipated by the retinue of servants in the Setalvad home was plunged into the complete antithesis of her life over the past seventeen years. The Divans were staunch Gandhians, practising and living the principles advocated by Gandhi to the hilt. They wore homespun khadi,⁴² lived a simple life with only one servant and three generations of the family resided under one roof. Sharda, grateful for the teaching ingrained from early

childhood by Krishnagauri who may have anticipated just such a situation, cooked and swept and washed and cleaned, not shrinking from even the most mundane or unpleasant task such as the cleaning of the toilets. Determined to make an unqualified success of her marriage she did whatever was asked of her by her grandmother-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law and young sister- and brother-in-law.

Jivanlal's first wife, Baburao's mother, had died when he was an infant and Jivanlal had subsequently married Chaturlaxmi. At the time of Sharda's marriage they had two young children, a five-year-old daughter and a son of less than a year. So well did Chaturlaxmi treat Baburao though that Sharda did not realise she was his step-mother until she was apprised of the fact much later. Baburao's step-sister and brother too practically grew up in Sharda's household when Baburao and she set up their own home some years later in Bombay. Reminiscing fondly on the occasion of Sharda's eightieth birthday many years later both would speak highly of the way she had treated them as her own children, raising them with a judicious mixture of strict discipline and warm affection to become successful and happy individuals. Her brother-in-law cut his first baby tooth on a gold locket that Sharda used to wear around her neck; her sister-in-law, clad always in simple and serviceable homespun cotton would exclaim with delight at the small but thoughtful presents Sharda brought her.

In the Divan household, Sharda was a favourite of Baburao's grandmother. Sensing how much this young woman meant to her grandson and knowing what a different life Sharda was living in this, her new home, the old lady went out of her way to spoil her. Calling her into her little room, she would talk with her at length and give her a small betel-leaf "paan" filled with almonds, sugar and spices to eat as a special treat. When Sharda would protest at this preferential treatment, the old lady would chuckle heartily and taking her hand say fondly: "But you are my favourite, child!"

Never one to abandon her own principles or beliefs, Sharda's only protest in her new home was her refusal to wear khadi. Gandhi had made the spinning wheel the symbol of his struggle for freedom. The logic he advocated was that its benefit was twofold -- it would give families work and income in the dead months and simultaneously loosen the grip of British capitalism. He was also convinced that spinning would discipline the Indian masses for the non-

violent attitude he demanded of them. Their pent-up fury would be unleashed aggressively not on the British but on this little wooden wheel whose constant revolution would soothe their frayed tempers and numb them into a calm determination to channel their energies towards passive resistance. Under Gandhi's mesmerizing direction the spinning mystique acquired an almost irresistible allure.

Gandhi asked the poet, Rabindranath Tagore,⁴³ to spin too. Tagore declined. He questioned this mystic cult of "spin and weave" that Gandhi had imposed on the people of India --"an outside influence seemed to be bearing down on them, grinding them and making one and all speak in the same tone, follow in the same groove. Everywhere I was told that culture and reasoning power should abdicate, and blind obedience only reign".⁴⁴ Why, asked Tagore, should this be so when even the birds on the trees outside his window were not restrained and could sing and fly and feed of their own free will? Gandhi admitted the need for more than he could just then offer his people. But he also retorted conclusively: "To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can appear is work and the promise of food as wages. God created man to work for his food, and said that those who ate without work were thieves. Eighty per cent of India are compulsorily thieves half the year. Is it any wonder if India has become one vast prison? Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel.....True to his poetical instinct the poet lives for the morrow and would have us do likewise. He presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of the birds early in the morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky. These birds had had their day's food and soared with rested wings in whose veins new blood had flowed during the previous night. But I have had the pain of watching the birds who for want of strength could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings. The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance.....I have found it impossible to soothe the suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem -- invigorating food. They must earn it themselves.....I do indeed ask the poet to spin the wheel as a sacrament".⁴⁵ Gandhi's impassioned rhetoric established beyond doubt his absolute belief that spinning represented a means towards self-reliance and self-respect. It created a bond of closeness among the spinners. It was a means of meditation, steadying the mind in

concentration.

Sharda, brought up on her father's practical teachings that textile mills and industries had to be supported and a student of economics herself, steeled herself against being moved by the emotional and spiritual force behind the *charkha* (spinning wheel). She did not agree to wear the khadi that her in-laws were clad in but continued to wear factory-woven fabric. To make up for this small rebellion and rebellion it certainly was when a seventeen year old newly married young woman refused to follow the dictates of her in-laws' household, Sharda went out of her way to make it up to them by conforming in every other respect, sometimes even willingly doing more than her share to let them know that her protest was not an insult to their way of life but rather an adherence to the liberal principles she had cut her teeth on. She was fortunate in the fact that Baburao always supported her for he knew she could not overnight cast aside the teachings of her childhood and meekly accept the beliefs of others as being the only right ones. In his own way, he too was a reformer and very conscious of certain "habits" of the system that contradicted his education.

"Caste" meals were in vogue in that era. The entire "caste" or community would be invited to meals which were partaken of sitting down in the streets outside the houses. Open gutters and old-fashioned lavatories ran parallel to the street and the stench attracted hordes of flies that hovered over the food laid out on banyan leaves on the ground. Baburao flatly refused to participate in such "feasts" and was dubbed the "health commissioner" and termed finicky. Torn between the traditions of the household she had married into and yet convinced that her husband was right, Sharda was forced to sometimes effect a compromise between the two forces and do what was expected of her as a daughter-in-law even though it sometimes disgusted and repelled her to do so. She bided her time, slowly making it clear that times were changing, that now, in the days of an ever-increasing population with its demands for sanitation and hygiene, it was no longer practical or safe to stick to all the old customs.

The National Movement was at its height and Gujarat, Ahmedabad in particular, was in the throes of a political and emotional upheaval. The years 1919 to 1921 were especially significant for they witnessed the birth of Gandhi's dynamic agitation of non-cooperation. It was as though a political hurricane had hit the Indian

sub-continent, sweeping in its fury the classes and masses alike. In a matter of weeks Gandhi's word became law. Thousands of men and women filled the jails, willingly accepting hardship and sacrifice. Bemusedly, the Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, described Gandhi to a British journalist: "Just a thin spindly shrimp of a fellow he was, but he swayed 320 million people and held them at his beck and call. He did not care for material things and preached nothing but the ideals and morals of India. You can't govern a country with ideals. Still, that was where he got his grip upon the people. He was their God. India must always have its God. First it was Tilak,⁴⁶ then Gandhi, someone else tomorrow. He gave us a scare. His programme filled our gaols. You can't go on arresting people for ever, you know, not when there are 320 million of them...Gandhi's was the most colossal experiment in the world's history."

The Divans, both Jivanlal and Chaturlaxmi, courted arrest in Gandhi's wake and were imprisoned a number of times. During one long period in jail Jivanlal fashioned a tiny cane box studded with seashells as a souvenir for Sharda. Touched by the old man's gesture she prized the gift as a constant reminder of the sacrifices dedicated Indians were making in their quest for liberty. Jivanlal and his partner would one day give their land and the school built painstakingly upon it to the nation. The property valued at the time in lakhs of rupees was willingly conceded on the stipulation that the partners would take from the Education Society a token sum of Rs250 per month and that after their death, Rs100 each would be paid to their widows. Reflecting the character and spirit of their husbands the widows would refuse even this amount on their deaths. The Divan Propreitary High School with its several branches and disciplines would stand decades later as an inspiring testimonial to the two dedicated couples responsible for its foundation.

One morning Jivanlal asked Sharda to accompany him to Gandhi's ashram. Sharda had heard much about this man and looked up to him with respect for his devotion to India's cause. Although she had never met him personally she knew that he shared a close and affectionate relationship with Chimanlal. In a letter he would write to Chimanlal at a future date he would call himself "*tamharo nano bhai*" or, literally translated, "your younger brother". Despite their divergent political creeds he often communicated with Chimanlal and sought his advice. On one occasion Chimanlal asked him: "If so, how do you consider yourself competent to express an

opinion on the present question the consideration of which requires knowledge of the existing law?" Gandhi replied disarmingly: "As an elder brother you have the right to rebuke me and it is my duty to accept the rebuke."

Sharda went eagerly to the meeting, looking forward to it. They entered the ashram and she walked towards his frail figure and was introduced. He gazed at her with his penetrating, almost hypnotic gaze and asked her: "Why are you studying in one of those British colleges run by foreigners -- why don't you also take up our cause as your in-laws have done?" Sharda was stunned. Faced with this magnetic personality and his probing question, she looked him straight in the eye for a moment but remained silent, offering no spoken reply. She knew that in any verbal argument she would be the loser -- such was the force of this man with his deceptively kindly and vulnerable face and physique. She sat quietly, her only outward sign of agitation the almost imperceptible movement of her fingers which plucked at the folds of her sari until Jivanlal had talked to Gandhi and it was time for them to leave.

All afternoon she thought about what had transpired that morning. She felt as though she was the nucleus of an emotional battlefield where the warring factions were the respective ideologies of Chimanlal, Jivanlal and Gandhi -- for the first time she doubted, not knowing in whose favour she should or was expected to lean. She agonized over the question Gandhi had posed to her. In all her young life she had never once questioned the Setalvad precept that education was the most valuable asset one could hope to possess, more precious than any material holding. It was a discipline and an expression of oneself, a means to creativity and individuality and above all, lasting achievement.

Chimanlal had told her about Governor Sir James Meston's⁴⁷ Minute of Evidence before the Southborough Committee which summarized the state of Indian education in 1919 as: "the inevitable tendency to drop standards, the pathetic attempts to increase the quantity of literati and graduates without regard to quality, and the constant attempts to bring in schoolboys and university undergraduates into politics."⁴⁸ The Home Rule League had involved students in political agitation in 1917 while Sharda was still in school but because of her intensely focused determination to study and relative seclusion within the aloof confines of the Setalvad home, the turmoil around her had left her relatively unimpressed and un-

affected despite its fervour.

In the ensuing Non-cooperation Movement, Gandhi openly encouraged students to take the initiative. In a country "groaning under foreign rule" he argued, it was "impossible to prevent the students from taking part in movements for national freedom." In *True Education* he wrote: "In 1920-21, I had not an inconsiderable share in drawing students out of their schools and colleges and inducing them to undertake political duty carrying with it the risk of imprisonment. I think it is their clear duty to take a leading part in the political movement of their country."⁴⁹ The young men and women he addressed were easily incited for the most part for behind their revolt lay a long record of forcibly suppressed and frustrated ambition and disappointment. Most of them belonged to the social class which was still supposedly being groomed for equality. Yet almost everyone, individually or within the family circle, knew the hypocrisy of this promise. They had run out of patience and they responded eagerly to Gandhi's appeal. Some totally abandoned their books to help him by becoming full-time workers of the Congress. Gandhi asked them to learn how to spin and go to the villages of India. Some enrolled in the new centres of education being rapidly founded by the Congress which offered an Indian course of studies and vernacular instruction. Gandhi founded a National University of Gujarat in Ahmedabad. The institution, sketchily financed out of the Tilak Fund, attracted some outstanding teachers. But it was obvious that proof of talent alone would not persuade the Government to recognize rebel degrees. Here was the tragic aspect to the movement that few actually did or were willing to realize and acknowledge. The students who followed the Mahatma were throwing away their parents' savings and destroying their hopes for their futures, almost inevitably breaking their hearts.

Sharda thought: "Is it fair of him to do this to young people whose entire future lives are at stake? How does he justify his actions? Isn't his call imposing another type of compulsion on the young who cannot resist his emotional appeal and taking advantage of their immaturity? What security does he offer for the sacrificial loan of their youth and the destruction of their dreams?" And she compared what she felt to be Gandhi's impassioned, idealistic approach with Chimanlal's pragmatic and practical one.

Addressing a convocation of students, Chimanlal opined: "My attitude towards the problem of students and the current questions

of the day...what India needs specially at this crisis of her history is not amateur politicians and half-baked journalists and blind leaders of the ignorant masses. Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Gokhale⁵⁰ and the Liberal leaders of the last generation never encouraged University students to dabble in politics and current controversies. They were not the men to commit the short-sighted and unpatriotic blunder of tempting students away, more and more, from their proper duties and tasks. But the evil has now grown and spread to such an extent that the Universities should in my judgment make an united effort against it. An evil custom or tendency grows like a weed; neglect of duty and loosening discipline in one direction or on one pretext or another soon enfeebles the system as a whole and it may take decades to undo the mischief of a few thoughtless years."⁵¹

Resolutely, Sharda refuted the uncertainties Gandhi's veiled taunt had created in her mind. When Baburao returned home that evening she drew him into their room, closed the door and announced firmly: "I am never going to meet that man again!" Bewildered, Baburao asked: "What man and why are you so upset?" Tilting up her chin defiantly, she told him: "Gandhi -- he told me I should leave my studies in the "foreign" college and join his movement -- Baburao, I know that I am possibly going against your family's wishes in my decision and it hurts me to do so, for they are wonderful people and I hold them in great regard but this is something I have wanted for myself almost since I can remember -- I must graduate and use that knowledge even though I am not yet sure how and in what way I will be able to do so. I am only certain of one fact and that is that I will pursue the path I have chosen for myself and I will not meet that old man again because I know his dynamism could win me over to his way of thinking!" Baburao chuckled aloud at her vehement outburst, held her close for a moment and told her gently that she owed it to herself to do what she felt was right for her future and that he would reconcile his parents to understanding that she had set different goals for herself.

It was to Jivanlal and Chaturlaxmi's credit that, sensing Sharda's withdrawal and reticence neither was the matter of her joining Gandhi's other young followers mentioned nor did they try to dissuade her from returning to the "foreign" college when the holidays were over.

Shortly after this incident, Jivanlal disaffiliated his school from the British administration of the University of Bombay to which it

belonged and made it part of Gandhi's National University. The new regulations framed under the Universities Act of 1904 gave the university the ultimate power of recognizing and thus controlling schools. Schools which declared themselves to be "national" implying thereby that they neither accepted government aid nor were recognized by the university were sprouting rapidly. Their teachers and pupils were actively associated with political agitation. Craddock, Chief Commissioner of the Central Province,⁵² stated vehemently: "...We must strike at these evils at their root, and protect the young from the danger that threatens them, instead of standing with folded hands watching nurseries of rebellion growing up round about us."⁵³

It was now mutually decided by father and son, much against Sharda's convictions, that Baburao should abandon his legal studies and go instead, to the United States of America to study pedagogy, the science of teaching, at the Columbia University in New York. This would equip him to run the national school on his return. In vain Sharda pleaded with him to resist the well-intentioned argument brought to bear on him by his father. She understood the old man's pride in the school he had founded, understood too his utter conviction that with the advent of India's freedom, which could not now lie too far in the future, there would be need for a nationalistic pride to be inculcated in free India's young minds in institutions such as this but she felt it was grossly unfair to expect Baburao who had his heart set on becoming a lawyer to suddenly leave after years of hard work and pursue a totally different career. It was also an indisputable fact, that of all the professions, none, in that era, was more appealing than the law. "It was, in a sense, a profession fashioned by the historical moment; a way out for those whose self-respect did not allow them to work for the British against their countrymen, but who could simultaneously exploit the system to build their position in society and approach the British as equals."⁵⁴ Sharda was very aware of the importance of the legal profession and knew well the rewards that waited to be reaped by those who entered it. It was Baburao's and her entire future at stake here but she was unable to deter him from the commitment that he, caught up in the infectious tide of patriotic fervour welling up around them, felt he had rightly made and he left for America towards the end of 1921, returning to India only in 1923 when Sharda was just completing her B.A. degree.

The separation was hard on the two, the more so because Sharda was assailed by doubts and misgivings about the decision Baburao

had chosen to make. Nevertheless she tried to be optimistic, writing Baburao long and cheerful letters that masked her anxieties for she knew that it was futile to harp on what might have been had he not taken the decision he had. Back in Bombay in her parents' home she plunged herself into her studies promising herself that she would somehow live up to the words that had been dinned into her by Motilal, her "motabhai" as he was affectionately called, from earliest childhood -- "Acquire knowledge but see that you use it for yourself and for others and work -- let it not rust."

Sharda was back "home" in the midst of all that the word implied. Chimanlal was now "Sir Chimanlal" having been knighted in 1920 in recognition of his services as Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University and "raised to the dignity of Knight Commander of the most Exalted Order of the Indian Empire (KCIE)" when he was acting as President of the Indian Legislative Assembly. During Sir Chimanlal's Vice-Chancellorship, the University made great strides. When he took office there were seventeen colleges affiliated to the University and when he retired the number had grown to twenty-nine and the University Reserve Fund had risen to the colossal figure of thirty lakhs thanks to his economic management.

On November 22nd, 1921, a special convocation was held to present an address of welcome to HRH the Prince of Wales at which Sir Chimanlal, as Vice-Chancellor, read the address. Sharda glowed with quiet pride in her father's achievements and listened well as he addressed the students: "The aim and purpose of university education must be to create a habit of mind which will last through life, based on correct ideas of freedom, and to create a capacity for discipline and sacrifice. Intellectual training is but of secondary importance. Education must make men of character, the mainsprings of which would be dutifulness, courage and harmony. Cultivate self-reliance, self-knowledge and self-control."

Sharda heard him speak and the words spoken with quiet passion were embedded in the recesses of her mind. One day in the future they would be called forth and implemented as she, in her turn, would guide young minds and lay down the principles for their "real" growth.

The eighteen months were drawing to a close and the separation was nearly over. Sustained by letters during what had seemed an endless absence from each other, Baburao and Sharda looked forward impatiently to being together again. Sharda was in the midst of

preparations for the B.A. final examination when Baburao returned from New York and their joy at seeing each other again was tempered by restraint to allow Sharda to study for this last set of examinations. The examinations came and went and the results were declared. Sharda was now the proud possessor of a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Delighted with her sister-in-law's success, Motilal's wife ordered three new sari blouses of a similar pattern for Sharda, Kusum and herself to wear to the university convocation at which the B.A. degree would be formally signed and conferred on Sharda by the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad! The Governor was to preside on the occasion and the first row of seats had been reserved for his party and the Vice-Chancellor's family. The new blouses were of a square, open-necked design and quite daring as far as Setalvad habits went -- Krishnagauri frowned slightly in disapproval when she saw her daughters and daughter-in-law preparing to leave for the convocation but was reconciled to the fact when Motilal, her "pillar of respectability" said he saw nothing "un-decorous" in their attire.

The high vaulted roof of the University of Bombay's convocation hall echoed with the speeches being delivered to another generation that was going out into the world armed with the knowledge it had received in the University's colleges. The graduating students had earlier been given their stiffly rolled degrees and seated in the rows assigned to them. Among them sat a young woman, slim of stature and with a slightly stern expression remarkably like that of the man speaking from the podium to the assembled students and guests. Overcome with the emotion of the moment, the scene misted before her eyes and she closed them for an instant, lost in an imaginary dream.

In her reverie, her name was called out, she rose and walked gravely down the aisle and up to the dais where a proud Sir Chimanlal permitted himself a brief smile of approval as the rolled-up parchment was handed over to her. It was a moment of shared triumph for the father who had instilled a thirst for knowledge in his youngest child and the daughter for whom her father's approval was a benediction in itself. In her dreamlike trance, she thought back briefly to her early childhood when she had followed him around listening to him talk and absorbing what he said even though she did not understand the import of what he talked about. Perhaps he remembered the little girl who had tried hard always to live up to the

standards he had set and who was now trained to reach for her own star. It was a poignant moment for these two people and as Sharda opened her eyes again she glanced towards Sir Chimanlal and saw that he too had indulged in a brief moment of nostalgia. The convocation ended and Sharda and the other members of her family were introduced to the Chancellor, Sir George Lloyd, Governor of the Bombay Presidency. She shook hands with him politely and then turned to her proud family, her eyes on Baburao who smiled at her, the expression in his eyes telling her that her success was also his own.

When the excitement of graduation had worn off, it was time for Baburao and Sharda to return to Ahmedabad and to a life with different priorities and demands. But first they went to Mount Abu on a much-delayed "honeymoon". Escaping from the fierce heat of the Ahmedabad summer they travelled to the popular hill-station and stayed at a "dharamsala" or travellers' inn facing the famous Nakhi Lake. Their room opened out on a spacious verandah and they spent many quiet hours there in companionable silence. The time had come to take stock of the future and to make plans for what to do with their lives next. Interspersed with light-hearted and carefree picnics and a visit to the Dilwara temples with their magnificent carvings were moments of serious discussion and quiet contemplation. One morning as the first ribbons of light streaked the dark dawn sky they walked to the top of the Guru Shikhar looking down from its high peak to the little town spread out far below them. The world, it seemed, in those moments, was theirs for the taking -- all they had to do was reach out to it. It was their last day in Mount Abu and they climbed back down the hill with a slightly deflated feeling. That evening when the bags were packed and the calm inky stillness of night had finally soaked the earth, they stood on the verandah, arms clasped loosely and smiled gently into each other's eyes. Early next morning they returned to Ahmedabad.

In consideration of the young couple's politely unexpressed wish to be on their own, Jivanlal had of his own accord arranged for them to move into a small house at Ellis Bridge in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad was rife with political sentiment. Both Jivanlal and Chaturlaxmi were deeply committed to Gandhi's movement and the latter spun endless yards of khadi furiously, each turn of the wheel symbolizing another step closer to the freedom all were fighting for. Baburao began to teach in his father's school and Sharda, unable to

restrict herself to doing household chores, became a teacher at the Vanita Vishram School.

The Vanita Vishram was an educational centre that had been started with the intention of allowing girls in their teens as well as married girls and young widows access to education. The first Vanita Vishram was founded in Ahmedabad in 1907. A school for girls or Mahila Vidyalaya had been started here by a namesake of Sharda's, Sharda Mehta. The institution offered a year-long course during which the pupils were taught the subjects of English, Gujarati, history, geography, Sanskrit, Hindi, music, sewing and drawing.

Life settled into a routine broken by the constant stream of interesting visitors that came to the Divan household. A number of educated young men had migrated from Sind to Gujarat to teach at the National University founded by Gandhi. J.B. "Acharya" Kripalani⁵⁵ was one who frequented their home. Sharda looked forward to the stimulating intellectual discussions with the Kripalanis and the relationship forged in Ahmedabad continued when the young Divans moved to Bombay towards the end of 1925.

The move was motivated by the fact that Baburao was not doing justice within the limited framework of the family's school to the advanced degree in pedagogy that he had earned from the Columbia University. Friends of the family who admired the young man's talent and aptitude felt that there was no future for him in Ahmedabad and advised him to try and put his considerable qualifications to use in Bombay. The upsurge of national education had subsided somewhat and the school was running at a loss as more and more students left to study at institutions still affiliated to the Bombay University. It was a lean time for Jivanlal and his brother-in-law, Balvantrai Thakore, who jointly ran the school; at the end of that year each had personally earned only a few rupees. They both felt that Baburao's future, at least, should not be subjected to risk.

Back in Bombay, Baburao sought employment and Sir Chimanlal tried to help his son-in-law by setting up an interview for him with Mr. Jayakar of the Bombay Presidency Educational Service. The meeting took place and Mr. Jayakar subsequently telephoned Sir Chimanlal and reportedly told him: "Please do not mar the life and prospects of such an intelligent young man by allowing him to stagnate in a service for which he is too highly qualified." That judgement put paid to Baburao's plans to teach and after having explored the other options open to him, he chose to venture into the import-

export business. It was a trying period for both Baburao and Sharda -- in Ahmedabad they had at least enjoyed a modicum of security and their basic needs had been taken care of. Here in the cosmopolis of Bombay, teeming with young people like themselves, eager to make a success of their lives, they felt somewhat lost at first. Sharda had temporarily forgotten the hustle and bustle of life in the great city during the relatively quiet period spent in Ahmedabad. Life had moved at a different pace there, time had slowed it seemed but here in Bombay one's pulse quickened and anxieties surfaced more readily than they had in Ahmedabad and the home they had left behind in eager anticipation of making a better life for themselves away from the family school and environment.

The new business necessitated Baburao's travelling to Poona for a brief visit with his partner. He had so far not received the salary still owing to him from his employment in the Ahmedabad school and they had been able to save little from the paltry remuneration he had received as a teacher. A ticket had to be purchased for his trip to Poona and Sharda's brother Jivanlal tactfully offered a temporary loan to tide them over till their financial situation eased. Baburao returned with the princely sum of Rs.300, his earnings so far with a promise from the partner of commissions to be paid in the near future as the business progressed. Sharda and he rented a tiny apartment in a building named "Sita Villa" on Laburnam Road. Luck, as it proved in subsequent months, was not on their side. Baburao's partner did not pay the promised commission fees and crestfallen, he decided to set himself up independently in a similar type of business in Bombay. Sharda was soon chafing at the bit and wanting to escape the monotonous routine household chores that she found herself enmeshed in and Baburao and she decided that she should enrol for the M.A. degree at the nearby Wilson College, her old alma mater.

Back in the familiar world of books and animated discussion and above all, learning, Sharda revelled in her studies. No longer restricted to domestic chores and the monotony of planning meals, washing-up, shopping for basic necessities and having family and friends visit at all hours knowing she would be home, she thrived on the demanding new pace she had set herself -- she would cook in the morning and organise the household for the day, leave for college and return late in the afternoon when Baburao too would be on his way home; the evening would be spent visiting close friends or relatives or having them come and join them at home or merely in the

quiet satisfaction of being together and talking about what the day had meant to each. Time passes swiftly when one pursues what one enjoys and these were their years of freedom, of being responsible only for each other, of not having the burdens of other lives and other people's problems intruding in the space they had created for themselves. Only their families meant much to them both and they remained as close as possible to their respective parents and siblings.

Towards the end of the year their landlord asked them to terminate their lease in "Sita Villa" and they moved slightly farther away to a rather dilapidated mansion named "Purshottamdas Building" in the Opera House area. This meant a longer walk to and from college for Sharda -- she would cross the Sandhurst Bridge and continue down to the Wilson College. She was busy working on the thesis she would submit for her Master of Arts degree..

The subject she had chosen for her thesis revealed her farsightedness and instinctive, keen awareness of the problem that would beleaguer her country in the years ahead. Titled "The Population Problem of India" it confronted an issue which was little considered at that time but which would grow to alarming proportions in the decades to come.

Social norms favoured the archaic institution of child marriage, particularly in the still illiterate rural and mofussil areas. The rapidly increasing population was the result of an unending and vicious cycle. The wide prevalence of child marriage among all castes also prevented girls' access to education. Once married, a girl was totally forbidden to read and write because it was considered shameful for a girl or a young woman to hold a paper or book in her hand or to read in the presence of others in her husband's home. The Census of 1901 revealed that 70 per cent of girls under the age of fifteen were married. Lack of education and a misguided society steeped in superstition brought in its wake undernourished young mothers who were still children themselves and infants whose lack of adequate mental and physical well-being was a severe handicap from birth itself. India's vast majority of people -- the agricultural poor -- demanded quantity not quality as far as their offspring were concerned. They believed that the more hands there were to till the fields, the more prosperous and comfortable their lives would be. It did not occur to them that more hands to work meant more mouths to feed nor were they capable of realizing that this perverted logic was breeding the menace of successive generations of men and

women becoming a huge burden to the country. India's masses lived out their lives in desperate frustration and their women, who had no option other than uncomplaining stoicism, bore child after child and were robbed of their youth; the tiny reserve of well-being they had had as innocent children rapidly and cruelly depleted with their being thrust into married life.

What made this thesis more credible was the fact that the writer, a young woman of twenty-four, married for seven years already, had, in her determination to pursue her studies without the distractions of a family, lived up to the principles of self-restraint and abstinence advocated in her paper in an era in which birth control was unheard of and no medical means of help for the same was available.

A curious change came over Sharda as she researched the material for her thesis. She began to see and feel the almost unbridgeable intellectual and economic chasm that lay between the educated few and the less fortunate majority. She sensed that there had perhaps been a distinct reason and purpose for her having had the many advantages she had taken for granted, first in her parental and then in her married home.

It occurred to her that she had always been free, free to pursue her interest in education, free to choose her husband and more than blessed to have found a man who treated her as an individual equal to himself in every way that mattered, who respected her opinions and wishes and allowed her to live her life as she chose. Writing her paper, she realized that freedom was still a precious rarity for the women of her generation.

With this realization all her undefined energy and enthusiasm for education began to find a focus. She felt instinctively that she "owed" others the opportunity to seek the privileges that had been her own birthright.

Schooling and higher education for the girl-child was and would continue to be a largely unacceptable social concept in her country for years to come. An article titled "A critical examination of the education of women"⁵⁶ spelt out the situation statistically: "In British India alone there are about 13,000,000 girls of school-going age for whose education there is now no provision! Only 16 percent of the girls of school-going age (between the ages of 6 and 11) as against 50 percent of the boys, are actually in attendance in schools, most of which are but poor apologies for educational institutions. If the Governments were seriously to tackle this problem, they would

require more than 300,000 additional teachers, yet only 1500 teachers are now being trained each year. Again the education of girls is characterized by the same wastage which arrests the spread of literacy among boys. Indeed, it is even more acute because early marriage and other social factors are responsible for the premature withdrawal of the majority of girls from school. Not more than 13 percent of the girls joining the first class actually complete the primary course. This means that in the case of more than 85 percent of the girls at school, there is no certainty whatever that permanent and effective literacy is being achieved. The strong presumption would be that a very large majority of them are unable to read or write; and what is more, in the absence of village libraries, the remainder are likely to relapse into illiteracy. The financial implications are equally distressing. The amount of money now spent on girls' education is only 14 percent of the meagre sum spent on boys' education. The total cost of providing schooling for girls of educable age who are not at school would, at the rate of Rs.10 per girl, approximate to 10,000,000 pounds per annum."

The carefree abandon and simple outbursts of laughter and mischief that she had had the good fortune to indulge in at school, and the untold joy of learning itself, were by no means the norm for every young girl of her age. At sixteen and seventeen while she was discovering life and the world in books and spirited conversation, cocooned safely in the secure warmth of a family and husband who cared for and supported her, encouraging her to develop and express the potential of her individuality, other young women were already defeated and old in soul and spirit, their youth and sentiment stifled and crushed in almost intolerable subservience to selfish and uncaring fathers and husbands and the unceasing demands of children.

She recalled her days as a teacher in the Vanita Vishram School in Ahmedabad and realized that she had always enjoyed teaching and giving young minds the opportunity to grow, to become free-thinking and independent. That feeling now crystallized fully and from that time onwards there was no doubt in her mind as to what she would do with her future....she would dedicate it to education -- the education of women.

1927 -- the year was drawing to an end but on a high note of success. The long years of dedicated study were about to conclude and another achievement added as a page in her life. She was awarded the Master of Arts degree and in receiving it she set a minor histori-

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cal precedent -- she was the first Gujarati woman to have attempted and gained the M.A. degree. On the day the results of the M.A. examination were published she woke with a sense of delight, a feeling that the perseverance had paid off. The solemn child with long braids framing her thin face, the teenager with a zest for books and games, the young romantic, the bride, the wife now had another title, that of "scholar". Knowing what she felt, Baburao hugged her close, expressing by his gesture the pride in her achievement that mere words would not have been able to express. The day passed in a haze of congratulatory greetings and good wishes and a present with a note that she would treasure always. It read:

"Dear Sharda:

Herewith a cheque and a sari by way of a little present on the occasion of your success at the M.A. which has given me great satisfaction and pleasure.

yours affectionately
Chimanlal H. Setalvad"

Later, at a function organized under the chairmanship of Lady Laxmibai Jagmohandas two daughters of Gujarat who had blazed new trails in the academic world were felicitated -- one was Dr. Kumud Mehta, the first Gujarati woman to receive a doctorate of medicine in Edinburgh and the other was Sharda Divan, the first Gujarati woman on whom a Master of Arts degree had just been conferred.

Baburao too had a gift for Sharda and her joy was compounded when he told her that he had been appointed State Agent of the Princely State of Jamnagar by the then ruler, Jamsaheb Ranjit Singh. This meant financial security and an end to their tightly budgeted days for the moment at least. Visits to Jamnagar State were an enjoyable experience and the Divans stayed in a little palace named "Vijay Bhavan" with the Jamsaheb's nephews, Duleep Singh, the reputed cricketer and Pratap Singh. A niece, Bhaniba, became a good friend of Sharda's. Both the Divans were treated as members of the Jamsaheb's family and in this manner a close friendship developed between Baburao and the young Duleep Singh. At official dinners and banquets attended by members of parliament and other dignitaries, Sharda's help would frequently be solicited as the ladies

of the Jamsaheb's household maintained strict purdah and did not appear at such functions. Often Sir Chimanlal who was the Jamsaheb's retained lawyer would be present and this gave Sharda the opportunity of seeing her father from time to time.

The Divans divided their time between Bombay and Jamnagar depending on Baburao's official commitments. Interspersed between the two were visits to Ahmedabad. It was a "lazy" interlude in Sharda's hitherto busy life -- her studies were behind her, the chart of her professional future not yet mapped. Living in Jamnagar and Ahmedabad was like commuting in completely different worlds. On the one side the pampered luxury of Jamnagar State; on the other the sensible, practical life lived in Ahmedabad and Bombay.

And somehow Sharda too was a different person. The years had mellowed the tempestuously determined young feminist -- she no longer adhered to "fervent" beliefs; time had tempered these to "strong" ones with room to accommodate those of the other people around her. In Ahmedabad she watched with admiration as her in-laws upheld Gandhi's fight for freedom and worked together with stalwarts like Vallabhbhai⁵⁷ and Maniben Patel. Gujarat was awash with floods and Sharda, who had by now returned to Bombay, found herself swathed in a homespun khadi sari, walking from house to house and collecting donations for flood relief on behalf of her father-in-law and the Patels. She took it as another challenge and experience and as was her habit, involved herself totally in the work allotted to her.

It was a talent cultivated since her earliest childhood, this ability that she possessed of becoming utterly absorbed in whatever work she happened to be doing. A characteristic that would make a deep and lasting impression in the future on her eldest grandchild. For that granddaughter she would always represent the living spirit of a true *karma-yogi*, a term simply translated as one devoted to work to the extent of its unconsciously becoming a form of intensely focused and concentrated meditation.

Seven years earlier, Sharda had glimpsed Lady Premlila Thackersey from afar when walking in Mahableshwar with her father. She had noted his praise of the young woman and filed it away in her subconscious memory. So it was with some surprise that she received a message stating simply that Lady Thackersey wished to meet her in connection with a proposal she had in mind. Slightly puzzled, Sharda showed Baburao the note and asked: "What can she

possibly want to propose? We don't even know each other, why we have never even met!" But Baburao had no answers and so merely shrugged and said: "Well, go and meet her and you'll find out soon enough!"

On the appointed day, Sharda appeared at Lady Thackersey's and was ushered into the presence of a short, slightly stout personage who looked at her visitor assessingly and then with a slight smile said: "I'm sure you are wondering about this unexpected summons. Come and sit down -- I would like to ask you something. I have heard much about the good work you have done in the Vanita Vishram School in Ahmedabad and I understand you are dedicated to the teaching profession. As you perhaps know, my husband's family supports the Vanita Vishram English School in Bombay with a financial grant which is administered by me in my capacity of Chairman of the governing body of the Vanita Vishram Association. I feel you may be able to assist us in running this institution -- would you consider being appointed Principal of the school in Bombay?" For a few moments Sharda let the words sink in, thoughts rapidly running through her mind.

Lady Thackersey allowed her time to reflect on what she had just proposed while dispensing with the social amenities of pouring tea and offering her a cup. Sharda took the cup and answered frankly: "My answer is yes. I am interested at the prospect of once again coming into contact with young minds but I must say now that my joining your institution will have to be on my terms. I will accept the post of Principal, but on an honorary basis. I ask only that the authorities fulfil the academic demands I make. If this is acceptable to you, I am willing to offer my services." The two women looked at each other and, the formality of their meeting behind them, proceeded to chat amiably for the next half-hour after which Sharda, shedding the sedate demeanour she had displayed for Lady Thackersey's benefit, travelled home bursting with excitement at the thought of surprising Baburao with her news.

When he walked into their apartment that evening she flew to greet him -- "You'll never guess what she wanted to propose! I am to be Principal of the Vanita Vishram English School here and I am to be allowed to do as I see fit! Isn't it wonderful!" Baburao smiled indulgently and said: "Madam Principal, may I suggest that in keeping with your new status you not waltz around the room or you may trip over the hem of your sari and that would be undignified indeed!"

Laughing, they went into the kitchen where Sharda put the finishing touches to the evening meal.

At first sight the Vanita Vishram English School did not appear very encouraging. Four classes were accommodated on the ground floor in the not overly-large hall which was divided by partitions of eight by ten feet. There was a grand total of four teachers. They were expected to teach all the subjects offered by the school amidst the din of passing traffic and the chaos created by the twenty-five students!

It was an awesome task that faced her but when Sharda made up her mind to do something, she did it. Within three years she had pressured the authorities into giving her ample furniture, the entire fourth floor for the school alone and the requisite number of teachers for the students whose number had by now increased to the impressive count of three hundred. She maintained strict discipline within school hours but made it a point to treat her teachers and students as family outside of the school. She was always ready to hear a complaint or solve a problem for she knew that only by forging close bonds with the people she worked with daily could she extract the best from them.

In addition to the school the Vanita Vishram maintained a widows' home. The manager of the home was an elderly lady who also administered the primary and secondary school which was run separately from the English school. This old lady was set in her ways and apt to appropriate the grants allotted to Sharda's part of the school for her own purposes. Although she tried to win Sharda over in an attempt to continue to wield the "power" she had acquired over the years, she soon realised that the young woman was not prepared to make compromises or be bypassed in administrative matters. Eventually the two settled into a working, if not exactly amicable relationship.

Sharda, in addition to her duties as Principal, herself taught the subjects of English and geometry and the school, under her guidance, soon acquired a sound reputation, preparing its students for both the Bombay University matriculation and Indian Women's University examinations. In 1930, she resigned from her post in joyful anticipation of an event for which she had waited ten long years.

A son was born to her on May 15th, 1930 and named Anil.⁵⁸ The year of his birth saw India in the throes of freedom fervour. Responding eagerly to Gandhi's call, the women of India, in

unprecedented and unspoken consensus, began to cross the invisible lines drawn on the threshold of their homes and stepped out boldly, despite their inherent shyness, to join in the struggle for freedom.

It was a twofold struggle -- they were simultaneously refuting British rule and centuries of social oppression.

On March 12th, Gandhi had led dedicated men and women on the historic Dandi march, an event on which the eyes of the world had focused. Jivanlal Divan had been one of the principal organisers of the march and combined with the rigours of frequent imprisonment it had told severely on his health.

The Civil Disobedience Movement had spread throughout India -- in the city of Bombay men and women boiled sea water on the Chowpatty sands to defiantly produce salt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya recorded the scene: "On April 6, 1930 thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper; and, instead of uniforms, the simple cotton saris of village India. One watched them fascinated and awestruck. How had they broken their age-old shell of social seclusion and burst into this fierce light of open warfare? What had stirred their ancient quietude and turned them into militant rebels? Undoubtedly the women turned this struggle into a beautiful epic."⁵⁹

"Through that summer of 1930, day by day, the streets of Bombay would be livened in the early morning with songs of freedom sung by troupes of patriots rousing the people to action..women could be found all over the city, sitting outside the liquor shops and foreign cloth shops, plying their little "spinning wheels" (called *taklis*), silently warning every Indian that he must not buy from that shop. Sometimes the stools on which these women sat through the heat of the day were provided by the shopkeepers whose trade they were destroying. Many of the women had never taken any part in public life before. Some came straight out of *purdah*; at the end of the day, they would have no idea how to go home, and must patiently wait till a husband or a son came to take them away."⁶⁰

Gandhi's exhortation of equal participation for women in the independence movement changed the lives of many of them. Their world was no longer the same for they had begun to look outside of the narrow four walls that had hitherto confined them. For the first time they sensed the power of their own potential. The Indian woman had broken out of her cage and was ready to seize the

opportunity to shape her own destiny.

Strikes were the order of the day and several incidents of rioting and disorder occurred in various major cities. In the tense atmosphere that prevailed in the month of May 1930 it was decided to hold the first Round Table Conference in London -- Sir Chimanlal and a number of his Liberal colleagues were invited by the British Government to attend.

Speaking at the plenary session of the Conference in November 1930, Sir Chimanlal was to assert: "Those who say 'Go slowly; do not quicken the pace' are like some guardians who will never realize that the ward is no longer a ward but has now become a self-determining adult. Those guardians and those politicians who take that view are sadly mistaken. The ward who has now become a self-determining adult is determined to have his way, to come into his own, to have the management of his own estate in his own hands. It does not do for the guardian to say "If I hand over your inheritance to you, you may mismanage it, you may manage it inefficiently, and you will commit mistakes". Mr. Prime Minister, we are perfectly conscious that we may commit mistakes and that for some time our administration may be comparatively inefficient, but we are determined to go through that stage, for we want to come into our own. We may not manage things as efficiently as you are doing now, but it is our affair and we want to be allowed to manage it ourselves...If you do not grant now what India wants, the position will be this, you will have to enter into a long-drawn struggle, increasing every day. You may put down disorder, you are bound to put it down, and you will do so; but at every stage it will, sooner or later, again break forth with increased vigour, and you cannot rule 320 million people continuously by force and by military power...I trust, therefore, you will make a wise choice. You can make India discontented, which will mean ruination for her and may mean ruination to England, or you can make now a contented India which will be the brightest jewel in the Empire and its greatest glory, and which will enhance the reputation of the Empire, which with all its faults, has excited not only the admiration, but even the envy of the rest of the world."

Heavy with the child she carried and the strain of his impending birth, Sharda again listened to two versions of the story -- the Gandhian from reports reaching them from Ahmedabad and the Liberal in her parents' home where she was staying before Anil's birth.

For the first years of his life he was a sickly child, prone to ill-health. Sharda would despair, for as an infant he would throw up his feed constantly and wail pitifully till the problem was diagnosed and treated to the great relief of his then exhausted, over-wrought and anxious mother. At a very young age he developed a tendency for frequent asthma attacks and Sharda would frantically remove him from Bombay and take him away to nearby hill-stations to recuperate and regain his health. Constantly at his side, she weathered the first few years of his life thanks to her strong will. Although both Baburao and she were overjoyed at the birth of this first child, their happiness was somewhat marred by their anxiety for his well-being. Both would try their utmost to keep him cheerful and happy but despite their efforts he was a solemn little boy, thin and pale in appearance except during bouts of energetic play and laughter when he was well.

Unable to pursue her career because of the demands on her time, Sharda who could never remain inactive, became a social worker during these years. She joined a women's organisation, the Bhagini Samaj,⁶¹ and was a member of its managing committee for a brief period. She took English classes for adult women and helped to organise welfare measures for the slum residents as part of the Bhagini Samaj Seva Mandir's programme. At a later date she was elected Chairman of the Samaj.

Time sped by and the first years of Anil's life were a source of great happiness for Sharda who had till then enjoyed her nieces and nephews and the children she had taught but always at a certain distance and without the special closeness that having her own child to love and look after, brought her. Baburao was doing well, she enjoyed the work she did on a part-time basis and her life was full. Kusum, with whom she had maintained an intensely close relationship true to their childish promises to each other, was a mother too. She was married to Dr. D. M. Desai, a well-known dentist, affectionately known to the family as "Dadda" and they had a young daughter. Although Kusum had not been lured by education's promise as her younger sister had, she did a tremendous amount of voluntary work at the Gandhi Seva Sena,⁶² an organisation run by women which had been started in the wake of the freedom struggle. The sisters met often as both the organisations they were working for were connected in that their objectives were common. Baburao and Dadda too were good friends and shared many similar interests.

The two couples spent much of their time in each other's company and Kusum helped to look after Sharda's household when Anil's health required her to leave Bombay at short notice.

On February 15th, 1933 a daughter, Anjani,⁶³ was born to Sharda and Baburao. The new baby was fair and chubby and the complete opposite of her elder brother in temperament. She grew up with the attitude that the world was hers to explore and that every moment of life had to be lived in such a way as to derive the maximum enjoyment from it. She followed Anil around like an eager puppy, wanting to do all that he could and protested with tears when he went to school and she was left behind at home. Almost as soon as she could walk and talk she insisted on going to school with him and having worn down her parents' patience was enrolled as the youngest "scholar" in the nearby New Era School. As much as Anil was Sharda's child, so Anjani was Baburao's. Fascinated by this small creature with her mop of black curls and engaging grin offered to all she came in contact with, Baburao was captivated by her infant charm from the moment of her birth. Sharda and Anil were often away from home and Baburao spent most of his time with Anjani as it was difficult for Sharda to travel with both children always. These were magic years -- the Divans existed within a charmed circle, somehow at peace and happy despite the turmoil being created all around them as India fought her war for independence from the British yoke. They had each other, two wonderful, bright, intelligent children -- what more could anyone ask for?

As far as Sharda was concerned, a career was the only element missing in her life. She had tasted success and it was hard for her to now keep in the background with a nagging feeling that the years were passing her by. She had waited ten years to have a child because she was chasing her dream of achievement in the scholastic sphere -- surely all that work and sacrifice should not be allowed to go to waste just because she was now the mother of two children? As always Baburao understood her turmoil and proved supportive and encouraging. He knew the needs of this volatile woman he had chosen to be his wife, knew it was hard for her to make up her mind alone without a nudge in the direction she wanted to go from him and so he pushed some of his own dreams into the background and helped her make the decisions he knew she needed to make.

The Builder and Her Legacy, 1936-1975

"If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will." William James, *The Will To Believe*

"A Dream becomes Reality"

"Therefore, as we build, let us think that we build forever. Let it not be for present delight or for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think, as we lay stone by stone, that a time is to come when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them."⁶⁴

Destiny had prepared the ground in the brief moments when Sharda had glimpsed Lady Thackersey riding on horseback in a park in Mahableshwar and listened to Sir Chimanlal praise her. This woman, a great achiever herself, would play a major role in Sharda's life from the time she approached her with the request that she become principal of the Vanita Vishram girls' school in 1927. Premlila Thackersey and Sharda Divan would share a great part of each other's lives -- their relationship would encompass the roles, at times reversed, of a mother and daughter, of a "guru" (teacher) and "chela" (pupil). Together they would build an institution for the women of India that would be a living testimonial to their deep and true commitment to making higher education accessible to their sex.

In one of their earliest conversations, Premlila advised Sharda: "Work towards one solid goal instead of being on many committees of different associations -- that will give you satisfaction and enrich

the cause for which you work." Premilila had herself lived an eventful life by the time she met Sharda. Born in an orthodox family in Rajkot, Gujarat, she was married at the age of eighteen to Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, a leading industrialist and philanthropist of his time. Her husband being much older than her for she was his third wife, she was widowed at the young age of twenty-seven. When she married Sir Vithaldas she was a raw child-woman who had been exposed only to the rudiments of vernacular schooling. With Sir Vithaldas' encouragement and the teachers and tutor-companion he employed to groom her she became proficient in Sanskrit and English, etiquette and the social graces. When they married, Vithaldas told her: "Our marriage is not meant only for affluent living and enjoyment but for the service of society and those less fortunate than ourselves." Determined and intelligent, she not only fulfilled his aspirations for her but far exceeded his hopes for her future by making his own dream of educating women a reality. The young woman from Rajkot made of the university the child they never had and occupied the seat of Vice-Chancellor for twelve fulfilling years.

In Sharda, Premilila encountered an equal, a being perhaps even more impassioned and devoted than herself. She admired and respected her candour and forthrightness, her hard work and devotion to the struggle both had opted for, her courage and support. The history of the university is also the story of their lives.

The saga of women's education in India from the 19th century onwards was plagued with apathy, prejudice, superstition and first and foremost, opposition. Professor Dr. D.K. Karve, an individual of simple and unassuming character was greatly responsible for the reversal of these sentiments and the changes that were wrought in the wake of his initiative. This remarkable person was a great reformer and farsighted educationist who had chosen teaching not merely as a vocation but as his mission in life. In 1896 he translated his ideas on the emancipation of women into practice by founding a Hindu Widows' Home.

The treatment meted out to the Hindu widow, particularly the child-widow was barbaric and utterly devoid of human sentiment. For the bereaved girl-child, unsuspecting in her innocence, widowhood was living death. Sufficiently starved to ensure that she would become too weak to voice even the feeblest protest; stripped of every vestige of her femininity -- the bangles adorning her arms smashed, the red symbol of marriage on her forehead wiped away

ruthlessly and the trauma compounded with the humiliation of being forced to shave her head every month; barefoot; branded with the stigma of being an ill-omen and an outcaste by virtue of the unflattering, starkly white or ochre-coloured sari she must wear perforce, the Indian widow of past years was reduced by society to a travesty of a human being, bewildered and uncomprehending of the fate that had ensnared her.

Being a widower himself, Karve was struck forcibly by the harshly disparate lines of distinction drawn by an unfeeling Indian society between the male widower and the female widow. His first step towards rectifying the injustice that society had dealt these hapless creatures was to marry a widow himself and found a sanctuary -- The Hindu Widows' Home -- where such girls and women could study, work and restore a measure of their lost self-esteem by a sense of belonging and being cared for.

In 1907, he expanded the Home to include the Mahila Vidyalaya (Girl-Widow School), an institution which began by enrolling six women students. A year later, an Englishman, Major Hunter Steen, described Karve's new venture prophetically: "In a small house in Narayan Peth, Poona City..is to be found the tiny beginning, at least on this side of India, of what will one day prove the social regeneration of the country."⁶⁵

In 1915, inspired by a brochure describing a women's university in Japan, there sprouted again the germ of an idea which had been consigned, for the past ten years, to Karve's subconscious, the establishment of a university exclusively for women and with its own special curricula intended to train them to be efficient housewives and mothers. His belief in this as yet unmoulded concept fired by his imagination was reinforced by the fact that a role model already existed in another Asian country. The aim of promoting and establishing a women's university in Japan had been to: educate women as individuals for the development of their personalities, equip them to become good wives and mothers if they wished to marry and to educate them as equal members of the nation and participants in the task of nation-building. Much that was described in the prospectus coincided with Karve's own thoughts on the subject. That year, he confidently announced during his presidential speech at the National Social Conference in Bombay: "We must recognise that both national and social economy require that women should occupy a station of their own distinct from that of men. That they are as

integral a part of the social organism as men is beyond question, but that the office they have to fill is different, though equal -- perhaps greater -- in importance, is equally true...."⁶⁶

Karve's proposal for a university structured exclusively for women received mixed reactions. Some considered it to be an elusive ideal, others were apprehensive that it would prove a deterrent to women's education, limiting their educational options to a more sophisticated form of domestic capability. Several considered it to be an impractical idealist's dream. Undaunted by the response his proposal had evoked, Karve proceeded, in 1916, to found the Indian Women's University in Hingne in Poona as a society that received no official recognition but was established as a means to help raise the social and educational status of women. In his autobiography he was to record: "I was advancing in age and was already fifty-seven. Therefore, if any hazardous step was desirable, it was necessary to take time by the forelock. I knew the difficulties that had to be faced and the chances of failure far outnumbered those of success. The idea had to be given a trial at any risk. I thought that failure was no disgrace if sincere and unsparing efforts were made."⁶⁷

The realization of Karve's ideal was not just, as appears perhaps in retrospect, the simple establishment of another educational institution. It was a tremendous feat achieved at the considerable cost of defying a rigid and unyielding society and it heralded the advent of a new era in the education of the Indian woman.

Karve's efforts struck a chord of response in Sir Vithaldas Thackersey. To quote Lady Thackersey: "Progressive and enlightened womanhood was for Sir Vithaldas Thackersey too a sure symbol of a progressive and enlightened nation, even as enslaved, ignorant and illiterate womanhood was a symptom of a backward and degenerate society."⁶⁸ The Poona campus founded by Dr. Karve which included the original widows' home and primary school in addition to the college itself, came to Sir Vithaldas Thackersey's notice in a curious way.

The Thackerseys were planning to undertake a voyage round the world and Sir Vithaldas was looking for a lady companion for his young wife. The first graduate of the Indian Women's University, Sitarbai Annegiri, was chosen to accompany them. Their journey also took the Thackerseys to Japan and they took the opportunity to visit the Japan Women's University that Dr. Karve had used as a role model for his institution. On their return to India they found Dr.

Karve waiting on the wharf to welcome his protegee who had accompanied them. In gratitude, Sir Vithaldas donated a sum of rupees fifteen lakhs to Karve's university with certain stipulations, foremost amongst them being his insistence that the seat of the university be shifted to Bombay and that it be named after his mother, Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey.

And so, in accordance with his wishes, the S.N.D.T. Indian Women's University was brought to Bombay in the year 1936. This meant that the administrative seat was moved to Bombay but the existing facilities continued to function on the Poona campus under the aegis of the Bombay administration. The institution had still not been accorded official recognition or affiliation to other recognized universities.

In 1936 when Anjani was three and Sharda was again restless at the prospect of being just a wife and mother it was once again Lady Thackersey who approached her with the request that she join the Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (S.N.D.T.) Indian Women's University in the capacity of Registrar. Eagerly, Sharda accepted, but again in an honorary capacity.

All her life she would work on an honorary basis, accepting no monetary remuneration for her services. Baburao and she both felt she should share what knowledge she had acquired with others but not accept payment in return for doing so. Education and knowledge had been hers by privilege of birth. She felt, therefore, that it was only fair to give what she had received to others who hungered for learning the way she always had.

There had been only one solitary exception to her rule of "honorary" work and that too, was unrelated to teaching. The circumstances under which she had received her only "earnings" to date, paid to her by a solicitor friend of Sir Chimanlal's who had requested her to go to Surat on a curious mission for him, were unusual and somewhat amusing. One of the solicitor's clients there was a Muslim lady who remained in strict purdah. As she refused to accept her share of the property settled on her from a man, the solicitor asked Sharda if she could deliver the money owed -- a sum in the region of three lakhs of rupees -- on his behalf as he trusted her implicitly to do so. Sharda accompanied the solicitor to Surat on three occasions to deliver the money which was in ten-thousand rupee notes and received a fee of three hundred rupees per trip in addition to the expenses she incurred for the same.



- 1 Sharda as a child
- 2 Sharda Divan, 1923, on graduating from University of Bombay
with the Bachelor s of Arts degree



3 The military bungalow which housed the SNDT College and University office in Bombay in the early years



4 At the military bungalow (*l. to r.*): Principal Anjaria, trustee Vaidya, Chancellor Sir Sitaram Patkar, Governor Lord Brabourne, Premlila Thackersey, Dr D.K. Karve, Sharda Divan



5 Sharda Devi reading the Registrar's Report at the University's annual convocation, 1939. Seated, front row l. to r.: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maharishi Karve, B.G. Kher, Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Sitaram Patkar.



6 Opening ceremony of the new building of the SNDT Bombay campus, 21 March 1963. l. to r.: Sharda Devi, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Lady Thackersey, Jawaharlal Nehru



7 Escorting Indira Gandhi to the inauguration of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations

But her work in the field of education she carried out for the sense of delight it gave her and not from any expectations of monetary benefit. From 1936 to 1944 she worked in the capacity of Registrar, giving of her best and taking a keen interest in all that the work entailed. They were years filled with the satisfaction of doing what she enjoyed most -- working for the betterment of young women's futures by offering them the opportunity of learning in an appropriate environment.

The S.N.D.T. was a tiny institution in 1936, lodged in a small room in the Mhatre Building at Chowpatty. Sharda, as Registrar, and three clerks formed the sum total of the university's office staff. As the premises were not too far from the Divans' apartment in Gamdevi, Sharda usually walked to and from the office in an effort to conserve the office transport allowance fund, for she considered a taxi ride -- at 25 paise for the round trip -- to be an unnecessary extravagance! The women's college which had an insignificant number of students on its rolls, was housed in a shabby building in the neighbouring Girgaum area.

Soon, with the two women's persistent efforts, the office and college were relocated in a dilapidated military bungalow on the former Queen's Road. A typical barrack-like structure, its severity was redeemed somewhat by archways leading off a covered verandah into the rooms on the ground floor where sunlight probed tentatively through the dust motes and the cobwebs on the several tall, glass-paned windows that reached to ceiling height and were almost impossible to clean. Cracked and peeling wooden fretwork, begging for a coat of paint, ran the length of the first floor balconies. Chipped brick tiles, worn and pale from the relentless heat and speckled with fuzzy patches of mould caused by the humidity "covered" the roof-slopes. The building offered them the dubious basics of a roof over their heads and two floors worth of space to house the minimal number of students on their rolls and the office which administered the university's meagre budget of approximately one and a half lakh rupees. To anyone else, it would have appeared depressing and not worth the effort of renovating and organizing into fit accommodation for their purposes -- but not to Sharda.

For Premlila and her it meant a beginning, a stepping stone towards their final goal, the first tent on the battlefield on which the fight for "their" university would be fought.

Sweltering in Bombay's humid heat, making her paltry budget

stretch infinitely, Sharda persevered in her task of organizing the new quarters. The first floor and half of the ground floor of the old, dingy building accommodated the college and the rest was taken up by the university administrative office. Despite the enervating conditions under which she worked, she took quiet satisfaction in the fact that behind the unprepossessing facade the number of students slowly rose to a hundred and fifty as teething problems were tackled and a more professional manner of administration formed and adopted under her guidance.

In addition to her duties as registrar she was a member of the senate and syndicate, seats she would occupy even when she was well into her eighties.

A banyan tree grew outside the military bungalow. It was deeply rooted in the dry, dusty soil and its branches sprawled wide, creating an invitingly shady cranny. On blazingly hot afternoons, Sharda, unable to tolerate the stifling, murky atmosphere of her cramped and dingy little office would come and sit in this cool shade. Mopping her face with an already soaked handkerchief, she would close her eyes in relief as an infinitesimal wisp of air stirred in the foliage surrounding her and lean her weary head against the gnarled comfort of the blessedly solid trunk, escaping reality for a few solitary moments. For her the banyan tree became a symbol, a watchful sentinel and mute witness to her struggle, a guardian offering its benign protection for the moments of quiet desperation she spent under it. If the banyan tree could grow in this parched patch of earth, would not the seed that Lady Thackersey and she had planted sprout and bud and leaf to bear fruit?

Long years later she would once again sit under the tree and smile in rueful reminiscence for in place of the rough, scratchy soil and crumbling structure of yesteryear would be paved ground and there would have risen great buildings, towering over the ancient tree that, so long ago, had seemed so invincibly tall and strong.

Lady Thackersey ruthlessly used her social contacts to the utmost, exploiting the strength of the name she bore, and gradually, with the assistance of the central and local governments, Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy; Sir Jagdish Prasad, Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council; Dr. Seargent of the then central education ministry and the provincial governors, milords Brabourne, Wilson and Lumley, the university was able to acquire the military bungalow itself and the adjoining plots of land. The purchase was

financed by ad hoc grants allocated for the purpose. Now that they owned the property on which the S.N.D.T. stood, they felt a little more secure and could devote their considerable energies to more concrete plans for the university's future growth.

Although the property hurdle had been successfully overcome, they were still faced with the major problem of being afforded no official recognition. This meant that they were not eligible for financial aid from parent associations such as the University Grants Commission. The Bombay and Poona campuses had to subsist on the initial donation of fifteen lakhs given by Sir Vithaldas and subsequent smaller contributions received through Lady Thackersey's efforts. This sole source of income was somewhat augmented by a scheme of yearly memberships and patrons but was obviously not enough for more than the basic running of the existing facilities. How were they to grow if they had not the means to do so?

In addition, they had to face complaints from parents and criticism from the public as the degrees they offered were not recognized and thus, in a manner of speaking, "useless" to their recipients in so far as future careers were concerned. In an attempt to fall in line with the students' expectations, the nomenclature of the S.N.D.T. degrees was changed to overcome the anxious protest that had been voiced. The former G.A. (Graduate in Arts) degree was changed to the B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) and M.A. (Master of Arts) degrees offered by other universities. Although the names were different, the special courses in domestic science (later called "home science") offered by the S.N.D.T. remained the same as they were felt to be particularly helpful to women in general.

Sharda firmly believed that wherever one encountered a problem there was a solution to be found if one only had the patience to look sufficiently long and hard for it. She dealt with the woes poured out to her and listened to the dilemmas of both parents and staff with her characteristic matter-of-fact, competent manner. She heard them out, pacified them for the moment, offered them hope and encouragement when she had no immediate answers for the questions they posed. One or other of the teachers too would constantly approach her, glad to relinquish responsibility and heap it on her shoulders. The head of the college of education, once came to Sharda with tears of frustration in her eyes and said: "Shardaben, how can we add dimension to our work without space?" Sharda responded with a smile which she hoped looked brighter than it felt:

"Don't worry, somehow we will work it out and find you the extra room you need. If we have come this far, nothing can possibly stop us from going further." Mollified, her colleague left her in a slightly more composed frame of mind. Although Lady Thackersey would be informed of these and other more major incidents, she would take note of them but not involve herself with the day-to-day running of the institution. It fell to Sharda's lot to cope with the nitty-gritty aspects of soothing frayed tempers and facing indignant queries.

Yet another obstacle looming before her was the fact that their teaching media were the vernacular languages of Marathi and Gujarati. It was ironic that the very feature that distinguished the S.N.D.T. University from the other educational institutions of the time and that Karve had stressed as being essential to the education of Indian women now turned the tide of public opinion against them.

Karve's founding principles when establishing the university had been firstly, the use of the mother-tongue which he considered to be the most natural and effective medium of instruction and secondly, a differentiation in the courses of study to suit the distinct roles played by women in the country's social life. Although English was a compulsory subject taught to all the students, a certain element of prejudice crept into people's minds that because the medium of instruction was not English, the standard of teaching was bound to be poor. It was an apprehension whose roots were still deeply embedded in the soil of British imperialism and the influence it had exerted on Indian education. Indians themselves had abetted and even encouraged the neglect of primary vernacular education. In a letter to the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, Sir James La Touche, Lord Curzon noted: "I am quite of your opinion as to encouraging the study of Hindustani. But unfortunately, our main difficulty arises with the Natives themselves. They do not want to learn, or to study, or to become proficient in, the vernacular. They are all mad for English because it opens the door both of knowledge and of employment. This is intelligible and I doubt very much whether a policy of conservatism on our part -- to which I am inclined -- will have any success."⁶⁹ The fact that Indian children were taught English before being given the opportunity to master their own tongue was, in Curzon's opinion, a basic fault of the educational system: "...ever since the cold breath of Macaulay's rhetoric passed over the field of the Indian languages and Indian textbooks, elementary education of the people in their own tongues had shrivelled and

pined.⁷⁰ It was the vernacular tongues, in his opinion, that were "the living languages of this great continent." The supremacy of the English language was a fallacy that had invaded the Indian mind decades earlier and strengthened its grip progressively. The S.N.D.T. made strong efforts to correct this misapprehension -- refresher courses were conducted for teachers, books translated, new books published in the vernacular languages and additional highly qualified teaching staff engaged.

Brilliant young men, geniuses in their chosen professions, chose to help the fledgling university find its wings. They worked devotedly, accepting only a paltry token sum of money for the effort they put in to raise the standard of the S.N.D.T. and put its colleges at the level of others.

Another unusual feature of the S.N.D.T. was the fact that private candidates were also allowed to appear at its examinations, whilst ensuring that standards were maintained. Without this facility, for which Sharda could rightly be given a large share of the credit, many women who, by force of personal or social circumstance were unable to attend regular classes or courses, would have been denied the opportunity of gaining higher education. All these measures helped alleviate the doubts raised by parents and students but did not dispel the fact that unless recognition could somehow be gained, it would not be possible to implement the half-formed plans for the institution's growth.

On the home front -- Baburao, Sharda, Anil and Anjani -- the perfect family. Anil at eight was a lanky child, tall for his age and already showing signs of tremendous academic aptitude. Anjani at five was an affectionate bundle of mischief for whom all the world was a friend. The family had just moved to a new home "Puri Villa" on Laburnam Road. Their apartment was on the second floor of the old-fashioned structure and within walking distance of the childrens' school. In addition to Anjirabai who was the children's friend, confidante, strict nanny and housekeeper, they had Laxman who was a major-domo and chief general factotum in one. Between these two who fortunately were on excellent terms with each other, the Divan household ran smoothly and efficiently, allowing Sharda to devote a part of her day to the affairs of the university. Kusum proved invaluable in looking after the children when Sharda was tied up with work and more than an aunt, was a mother to Anjani who was especially close to her and Dadda. Life seemed to be perfect and into this

happy household there came in 1938 Baburao and Sharda's third and last child -- Shalini.⁷¹ She was a beautiful baby --fair and pretty and with hair of an unusual shade of rich, deep gold honey. Anjani, who had till then always looked up to her brother and tried to imitate all that he did, suddenly found in Shalini a live toy to play with, a companion like her in nature and as the toddler grew the two developed a special bond of attachment and soon became inseparable. The little girl was a source of constant delight to the rest of the family and grew into a sturdy youngster, sweet-tempered but with a stubborn will and determination that both asserted and proved her Setalvad-Divan ancestry.

Sharda took a brief leave of absence from the registrarship on account of Shalini's birth. Lady Thackersey was understanding and granted her the facility of flexible hours of work so that she could also cope with the demands made on her on the domestic front. On taking up the post of Registrar she had been appointed examiner for the matriculation examinations for three consecutive years. This meant that she was assigned a certain number of examination papers to correct. Enormous boxes of test papers would arrive on her doorstep and have to be tackled and submitted within a stipulated period of time. Sharda reviewed and marked the papers in keeping with her own high standards until the moderator, Mr. Advani, principal of the Jai Hind College, kindly told her after he had moderated about a hundred papers at random -- "Mrs. Divan, if you are going to be so strict, nobody is going to get through!" Sharda, chastened, took the advice he gave and modified her stringency to suit the level he advised her to keep to.

All this work took its toll of her time -- all her life, twenty-four hours would never suffice to do all that she tried to cram into them but her dogged determination and perseverance to neglect no part of her responsibilities allowed her to carry on. As her children grew, so too did their need of her. Somehow she managed to meet their demands as well as those of the fourth child she nurtured -- the S.N.D.T.

In a partnership between two people based on love and respect, one partner often furthers the other's ambition and is content to share his or her success whilst sacrificing his own, for the other's happiness means as much, if not more, to him. So it was with Baburao and Sharda. Baburao, a gentle, dignified and unassuming man, did his utmost all his life to see that Sharda was happy, that

Sharda's career prospered -- the happiness of Sharda and his children came first. Whatever plans and ambitions he may have had hopes for himself were quietly put away in the background when he saw the joy on the face of the woman he loved enough to have stood by and supported from the day their marriage began and he became responsible for looking after her.

Perhaps in the flurry and excitement of her professional life Sharda did not always realise the extent of his sacrifice, perhaps she was sometimes unconsciously domineering, propelled by self-seeking ambition. She had always felt an almost desperate need to assert herself in terms of achievement and education had provided her with the means for, once acquired, it was, to her mind, a statement of authoritative independence. Through education one could cross the boundaries of new and unknown horizons; it could slake the thirst of human curiosities. For a woman, especially, it represented fundamental and sustaining freedom without necessarily detracting from her femininity.

What prompted Sharda's constant search? What was the goal she sought that seemed to still elude her and to which she would dedicate almost her entire youth and adult life? Did she, deep in her psyche, seek to win approval and live up to a "Setalvad" ideal that she herself had defined as revolving around her father and eldest brother? Did not that same, overwhelming love and pride for all things Setalvad sometimes blind her to the fact that the world did not consist of the Setalvads and their way of life and opinions alone...that there were others close to her -- her husband, her children -- who cared and sacrificed themselves perhaps even more for her than the rather more pragmatic and unemotional members of the immediate Setalvad clan? And yet, it was that same Setalvad sense of almost puritan righteousness that insisted that she do her utmost to fulfil her duties and responsibilities towards the Divan family with as much interest and involvement as she accorded her own people. Compared to other women and from a feminine standpoint she held her emotions on a tight leash, yet that very stoicism was what sustained her through crises that would have devastated others. One fact was certain -- there were times when her husband and children paid dearly for her success, for achievement is never without its share of sacrifice, regardless of who is the victim.

If she rode roughshod over her family's feelings, if she intruded on their space and imposed on it her own definitions and limits, it

was unintentionally done and more than compensated for in terms of her genuine desire to ensure that she did not neglect or deprive them in any way. Her forthrightness and refusal to accept even the merest suspicion of grey on the severe black and white canvas of her mind was an inherited trait, a part of her nature and if it sometimes hurt those close to her it was also an advantageous and powerful asset. Together, Baburao and she were able to raise their children to be outstanding individuals in their chosen fields.

It was not that Sharda was uncaring or ungrateful for Baburao or her children's concern. It was just that events from her earliest childhood had swept her, almost to the exclusion of all else, up on the crest of a mighty wave that she was forced to ride for she knew no way of climbing off it. In later years as she reminisced, tiny moments and incidents would stand out with startling clarity and an innate sense of fairness would prompt her to admit honestly: "It was entirely due to my husband's absolute support and actual practical help in daily life that I could achieve what I did."

Small gestures, overlooked at the moment in which they occurred would emerge starkly much later and their significance would be noted with a sigh of regret that due appreciation had not been given to the person who made them. There was the Saturday morning when Sharda was late returning from work. Rushed because she had to go shopping, she ran into her room and opened the door of her wardrobe. There, before her, lay prepared a diary, a pencil and some money! Baburao, always considerate, had known she would be in a hurry and had tried to help by keeping the few items she would need for her shopping expedition ready for her return so that she would not waste time collecting them. Sharda was deeply touched but in the haste of the moment her thanks remained unexpressed till much later when the memory of that instant when she opened her wardrobe and saw what lay before her would surface.

Baburao and his deep love for her were her security, her strength. She would know and remember this in the years to come, remember it in the ebb and flow of her life.

1939 -- the storm clouds gathering in Europe were about to unleash their fury. Britain watched and waited uneasily as her leaders tried their utmost to avoid a conflict and made various concessions to Germany, hoping to appease Hitler's hunger for conquest. Their gestures were futile -- in a flagrantly insolent move, Hitler's troops swept through Czechoslovakia and Poland and on

September 3, Britain declared herself at war with Germany. Her Indian subjects looked towards the West wondering how this latest historical development would affect their own future. Gandhi met with the Viceroy on September 5, informing the Indian public in a statement he issued soon after the interview that from a purely humanitarian stand-point his own sympathies lay with England and France. "I am not just now thinking of India's deliverance", he said.

For the moment, the Divans remained relatively unaffected by the news that reached them although they sympathized with the hundreds and thousands of unsuspecting people whose lives had been shadowed overnight by the German threat. Their own days were busy with the daily activities that made them pass too quickly it sometimes seemed. Shalini had celebrated her first birthday, Anil was becoming a proficient badminton player who would soon make his mark on the national scene in the junior category and Sharda was fully occupied with the affairs of the university in her present position of registrar. When holiday time came around however, all five packed up and left Bombay for the cooler, fresher air of Ooty, Simla, Matheran or Poona. The children grew to associate each hillstation with the homes they stayed in there -- Ooty brought to mind Motilal's stately vacation home, a typical English house named St. Patrick's with a rambling garden in which one could run riot; Simla meant holidays with their aunt Mangu, a cousin sister of Baburao's, and her family; Matheran was associated with Venkatrao's sprawling bungalow "Ashok Villa" and pony rides on the rugby common and Poona -- Poona was the ultimate in luxurious and stately living for this was Chimanlal's second home set in acres of vivid greenery flanked by the river that flowed through the then small resort town approached by train from Bombay. Holidays were not restricted to only the five members of Baburao and Sharda's family but included a large brood of cousins whose parents for one reason or another could not accompany them.

The Divan youngsters grew up to be carefree but tough little people, well-disciplined by Sharda's often schoolmarmish strictness and Baburao's gentler but more unyielding control. In a way, Shalini and Anjani, in particular, were closer to Baburao than to their mother for it was Baburao who was more often "there" to listen to their childish woes and solve the problems that sometimes loomed large in their small worlds. Owing to Anil's continued susceptibility to bronchial asthma, Sharda was forced to pay more attention to him

and the family's savings too dwindled whenever she had to take him away from Bombay, sometimes for weeks at a stretch to recoup as it was felt that Bombay's humid climate was not good for his lungs. She cared for the boy as only the mother of an asthmatic child can -- when she was away from home with him her days were spent helping him catch up on the schoolwork he was missing and keeping his spirits up; her nights passed watching him take laboured breaths of precious air into congested lungs.

Her daughters therefore turned instinctively to their father who willingly made the time they demanded of him and catered to their childish whims. It was hard on the family to be separated from each other when mother and son were away and the father and daughters would write long letters to them describing their daily routines and proudly mentioning the small achievements in their lives. Basically vegetarians, the Divans did not cook meat at home. But Baburao wanted his children to have the option of being non-vegetarians should they choose. When Sharda was away from Bombay with Anil, a little procession would wind its way to the nearby Irani restaurant on a Sunday and there gorge gleefully on *akuri* --scrambled eggs with tomatoes, onions and green peppers -- and a delicious brown chicken stew with bits of toast, egg and chips swimming in the rich gravy "marengo". Licking their lips with satisfaction, Baburao, Anjani and Shalini would come home replete. Kusum would take over the supervision of the girls when Sharda was away. They would come home from school to find her awaiting their arrival, ready to hug and kiss them and listen to the tales they had to tell. Anjani grew very attached to her aunt in those years and sometimes thought of her as her "real" mother, willingly accepting her as a substitute for the one who was away. Sharda relinquished charge of her daughters unwillingly but was helpless in the knowledge that Anil needed her more than they did.

1939 was a memorable year in Sharda's life. On March 10, in connection with the celebration of Sir Chimanlal Setalvad's golden jubilee at the Bombay Bar, the Bar committee appointed for the purpose presented to the University of Bombay a marble bust of Sir Chimanlal. The bust was unveiled by the then Chancellor of the University, Sir Roger Lumley who said: "It is a rare thing in public for a man to see in his own life-time his bust or statue set up as a tribute to his work. Such a tribute is only possible when there is unanimity among his contemporaries and a strong general feeling

that such recognition is due. Sir Chimanlal has served the province, India and the Commonwealth of Nations in law, in government and in the University. He has given an example, and is still giving it of the way in which great gifts can be devoted to the service of the public. It seems to me, therefore, most fitting that this bust should stand in the hall of this University to which he has given so many years of unsparring work and where it can be recognised by the young men and women of future generations as a tribute to a man whose example should be followed."

His example would be followed and by no less a person than his youngest child --she who had worked to justify his pride in her in so many ways would in her turn take "her" university for women to great heights and make of it in the years to come a proud citadel from which all manner of young women would go forth, heads high, secure in the knowledge that they were well equipped to deal with the careers and lives they would choose for themselves. Shortly after she had congratulated him on this acknowledgement of his services, he would have cause to congratulate her on a momentous occasion in her life.

More than a decade earlier Sharda had met Mahatma Gandhi and been sufficiently awed by his magnetism to not want to repeat the experience, afraid that he would persuade her to abandon her studies in the "foreign" college and join his movement. But now that the goal of her education had been reached and safely put behind her she looked forward to meeting him again when Lady Thackersey suggested that they ask him to be the Chief Guest at the S.N.D.T. convocation that year.

The Mahatma was in Bombay, recovering his health from the historic Rajkot fast. Lady Thackersey and Sharda went to meet him at Birla House to make their request personally. When they walked into the room where he waited to receive them Sharda was shocked to see how lean and frail he had become. A nation and its people looked up to him expectantly as their saviour and the struggle and disappointments of a ceaseless battle with still no real end in sight had etched harsh lines on his face and forehead; the thin loincloth-clad body was stooped with weariness. Only the eyes sparkled with the intense light and inner conviction of a man at peace with himself. He smilingly accepted the invitation extended to him but only agreed to be present on the condition that he not be expected to speak on the occasion and that the report be read by the registrar in either

Marathi or Gujarati. The latter request typified the Gandhian tenet that the neglect of one's mother tongue was equivalent to "national suicide" and that English should yield to regional languages for educational and administrative purposes: "Among the many evils of foreign rule this blighting imposition of a foreign medium upon the youth of the country will be counted by history as one of the greatest. It has sapped the energy of the nation....it has estranged them from the masses....the sooner therefore educated India shakes itself free from the hypnotic spell of the foreign medium, the better it would be for them and the people."⁷²

When Gandhi arrived on the Indian political scene he discovered an elite estranged from its own culture, unable, quite literally, to talk to the people in their own language. He believed firmly that India would remain subservient until she freed herself from the "foreign" language in which she had allowed herself to become almost inextricably entangled and that the issue of a vernacular medium of instruction was of critical importance. Addressing a gathering organised by Annie Besant in February 1916 to commemorate the resounding of her school at Benares as the Hindu University Central College, Gandhi lamented in the presence of the Viceroy Lord Hardinge that he was forced to speak English, a "foreign language" in an Indian institute of learning: "Suppose that we had been receiving education during the past fifty years through our vernaculars, what should we be today? We should today have a free India, we should have our educated men not as if they were foreigners in their own land, but speaking to the heart of the nation; they would be working amongst the poorest of the poor, and whatsoever they would have gained during the past fifty years would be a heritage for the nation." By vernacular education, he argued, knowledge confined to an elite could be made freely accessible to all.

Lady Thackersey and Sharda complied with his request and proceeded with the arrangements. As the S.N.D.T. still had no suitable building to its name, the convocation was held at the Sir Cowasji Jehangir Hall.

On the day of the convocation two small children and their father walked proudly into the hall and watched the woman who formed the nucleus of all their lives stand up gracefully on the stage and read the registrar's report of the year's activities in the lilting tones of her native Gujarati. Behind her on the dais sat practically a full complement of India's political leaders -- Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas

Chandra Bose,⁷³ Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Chief Minister B.G. Kher,⁷⁴ Sir M. Visvesvaraiyya⁷⁵ and Sarojini Naidu.⁷⁶ Eminent figures in the field of education occupied adjoining chairs -- Chancellor Sir Sitaram Patkar, Dr. D.K. Karve, Justice Divatia, Hansa Mehta and Lady Thackersey. And in the audience facing her were the three faces of those dearest to Sharda -- Baburao, Anil and Anjani.

Delivering the convocation address, B.G. Kher noted: "...I have great hopes that we shall soon be able to transform the present depressing conditions by giving to female education the first place of importance in our scheme of education. We have a very uphill task before us. In taking the lion's share in performing it, the graduates of your institution will have an opportunity to justify the hopes and ambitions of the founder of this University. There is a demand for trained women teachers and for women workers in the several spheres of social reconstruction which the national Government has undertaken in spite of the difficult political limitations and surroundings in which the present constitution has placed it. In this great work of social regeneration, we need the assistance and the devoted service of a number of selfless and enlightened women. To dispel ignorance, and spread correct ideas, to remove untouchability, to improve the unsanitary conditions of life in our villages and render medical assistance...to spread the message of Swadeshi and communal harmony, to bring up and educate our young generation on right lines -- here is work enough for the most indefatigable spirit...God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please -- you can never have both".

The last quotation accurately reflected Sharda's life. She need not have opted to struggle, to work, to fight for a dream that sometimes seemed further from becoming a reality than ever. But had she not chosen the options she had, her life would have been mere existence, she would not have truly "lived". She looked at the others seated beside her -- they too had taken the hard path, a path on which, sometimes, suspended in bewilderment, they questioned the reason behind their choice only to be blessed yet again with hope and faith that what they were doing was right.

This day too was a page in history's book -- imprinted on the minds of those who were present and captured in a stark black and white frieze for the grandchildren and great-grandchildren who would see it with respectful awe in the pages of an album many,

many years later.

All days are not alike. Another dawned and Sharda had to face the senate on an alleged charge of some sort of irregularity in her administration as Registrar. The self-confidence and sense of right and justice that she had imbibed since childhood straightened her slim shoulders and held her head high. Armed with facts, figures and files she convinced the syndicate members, Professor Kaji, Dr. Jivraj Mehta, Dr. Karve, Lady Thackersey and others of the bonafides of her actions. On close scrutiny of the scrupulous records she had kept they were assured that there was no truth in the allegation and it was put down to mere harassment by certain senate members. For the young woman, it was a matter of her reputation being at stake but her background, courage and faith in herself withstood the volley of questions posed to her and established her integrity.

1942 marked twenty-five years of the university's existence. The society that had been formed by Dr. D.K. Karve in 1916 with the aim of offering equal educational opportunities to women was now churning out skilled young ladies by the hundreds. Each year a few more stood stiffly to attention in their crisply starched saris as they received their diplomas and degrees at the annual convocation. It was decided to celebrate the advent of the "silver" year in a suitably fitting manner and Sharda was put in charge of organising the various functions held to commemorate the same. Well-known personalities -- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan,⁷ philosopher; Sarojini Naidu, "the nightingale of India"; Lady Cawasji Jehangir and others -- presided over the several occasions. Sir Chimanshi Setalvad, one of the invitees, permitted himself a rare smile of gratification at seeing events. Seated in the first row he listened to her address the assembled guests at the inaugural function, fondly remembering the little girl who had stood before him and solemnly made earnest "speeches".

In 1944, Sharda reluctantly decided to resign from the post of registrar as she wanted to devote more time to her family and to Anil, in particular, who was suffering increasing bouts of asthma. Forced to travel with him often, it was becoming difficult for her to keep up the juggling act that home and career demanded. Lady Thackersey accepted her resignation unwillingly, insisting that she continue to be a member of the senate and syndicate as well as various committees on which she had been active. Sharda agreed

and groomed Laxmi Thackersey who had been working with her, to take over as Registrar. Although she was "officially" no longer associated with the university, in reality she continued to work there as often and as much as time would permit her to do so. Frequently she would go to Lady Thackersey's office and work late into the evening with her, helping her with the sorting out of administrative problems. She also, on more than one occasion, travelled with her to various conferences and vice-chancellors' meetings held in other cities. The hours spent with her mentor gained Sharda considerable valuable experience and let her feel that although she was "away" on paper, she was in actual fact a major cog in the university's wheel. When Laxmi Thackersey went on leave, Sharda, her children's schedules permitting, would take over as Registrar in a temporary capacity. In this manner she managed to enjoy her children's growing years and look after their needs whilst also keeping pace with the growth of her other "home", the S.N.D.T.

The original Poona campus of the S.N.D.T. too required supervision and there were times when Sharda, who was often in Poona with Anil, would look after matters there. Sharda stayed in Sir Chimanlal's residence in Boat Club Lane but spent many a quiet and peaceful evening in the ancestral home named "Parnakuti" that Lady Thackersey had inherited. The house was built on a small hillock overlooking the river and offered a calm serenity to its visitors. Officialdom dealt with, these two gutsy pioneering women would recount personal incidents of their lives and share a different aspect of themselves with each other. They talked in those softly lamplit nights of the things that mattered most to them.

Premila narrated the experiences of her youth, the tremendous transition from Rajkot to Bombay, her grooming at the hands of Sir Vithaldas and the life she had led at his side. A widow, and childless, she had nobody of her own to turn to in times of stress and it was Sharda she often leaned upon and trusted enough to confide in. The Divans, in a sense, became her family too due to her close relationship with Sharda. Gratefully Sharda accepted the fresh butter she sent during Anil's convalescence and asked for her help when Baburao's mother, Chaturlaxmi, who had been arrested for her involvement in the freedom struggle, was suddenly released from the Yeravada Jail in Poona. It was the monsoon season and both Bombay and Poona were in the grip of heavy torrential rains. Unable to reach Poona, Sharda contacted Lady Thackersey who

invited Chaturlaxmi to come and stay with her until she could make arrangements for her to leave for Bombay.

It was hard for Sharda to equally eke out time for work and time for play with her loved ones and find still more for the myriad demands made on her by both in the course of a twenty-four day. There were moments when she felt torn in two, uncertain as to whether she was giving a fair share of herself to the children so precious to her and to her other fledgling, the university. She would perhaps have felt even worse could she have known what fate had in store for her. The fifteen years of happiness Baburao and she had enjoyed since the birth of their first child in 1930 were about to end in a dark cloud of tragedy.

Towards the end of March 1945, Shalini suffered an acute attack of appendicitis. The day she fell ill, the family had planned to celebrate Anil's having achieved a first class in the school matriculation examination by seeing a film in the evening. Sharda insisted that they carry on with the programme and said she would stay home with the little girl. When Shalini's fever rose and she began to moan in pain, the family surgeon, Dr. Deshmukh, was summoned and opined that she should immediately be operated upon. Shalini protested pitifully at being taken to the hospital and Sharda had to steel herself to resist her appeals to be allowed to remain at home. Baburao carried her out of the door -- they could not have dreamt that she would not come back home alive. The operation went well and she was expected to recover easily but by the next afternoon when Anjani and Anil went to see her with the nanny, Anjirabai, she was delirious and could not recognize them. Alarmed, Baburao and Sharda consulted with the doctors but to no avail. Owing to the war, penicillin, perhaps the only known antibiotic to combat peritoneal infection at that time, was in very short supply. An anxious relative showed the child's horoscope to an astrologer who proclaimed that she would survive if she lived beyond midnight that night. Baburao and Sharda's hope-filled vigil was shattered when Shalini breathed her last at just two minutes to twelve. Disbelievingly they looked into each other's eyes and reached out for each other over the small, lifeless form of the little girl who had brought so much sunshine and laughter into their lives and who would now never smile up at them, disarming in her innocence. Who knows what memories spun through their protesting minds in those instants after she died, what echoes of childish conversation played in their numbed and deafened

ears. But grief had to be put aside -- news of Shalini's death had to be broken to her brother and sister who waited at home for a companion they did not know would never return to them.

Sharda called on all her reserves of stoic acceptance and somehow shouldered her terrible burden of sorrow. Anil heard his parents out bravely but Anjani, for whom Shalini had been a constant part of her own self, was stunned. Death had suddenly become a very real phenomenon to the young girl and in the weeks that followed the loss of the person who meant so much to her she turned as she always did in her moments of crisis to Baburao, taking comfort in listening to him talk of life and death and hearing him recite and explain to her verses from that eternal source of solace for the human soul, the *Bhagavad Gita*. It was a time of strained cheer -- the four of them grew closer together but were racked by memories of the one who was missing and the effort to remember not to say her name told on them all. Sharda plunged herself into her work, trying to forget and spent as much time as she could with the two children left to her, suddenly aware of how important the few hours she was able to find for them in the day, were.

Three months later, Anjani was rushed home from school one day with suspected appendicitis. Baburao and Sharda listened incredulously as the same surgeon who had operated on Shalini suggested lightly: "It's probably nothing but a stomach-ache brought on psychologically by the loss of her sister -- Shardaben, you are worrying unnecessarily. I can understand why, since you have recently been through such a tragedy but I don't think you should imagine this is the same illness!" Unconvinced, Sharda consulted other reputed surgeons and doctors and summoned Dadda and her very dear, adopted brother, Dr. K.T. Gajjar, a well-known pathologist, affectionately known to the family as "Kalamama". Both were definitely of the opinion that Anjani had a severe case of appendicitis. Baburao stubbornly refused to allow the child to be taken to a hospital. Shalini's piteous appeals still rang hauntingly in his ears and he promised himself that no other child of his would be taken away from home no matter what effort it cost. The decision to operate taken, Sharda organised a room in the house to be turned into an operating theatre. Sheets were sterilized and draped over the walls and ceiling. The room was thoroughly disinfected and heaps of gauze and bandages prepared for use. All afternoon and late into the evening, she worked with a vigour that came from she knew not

where, refusing to allow herself sentimentality or anxiety, working almost mindlessly, stifling the fear that rose in choking waves. Late at night Anjani was successfully operated upon and the eminent surgeon's face fell when he encountered a ripe, angrily red appendix. The operation over, the surgeon returned home but Dadda and Kalamama stayed with Sharda as she kept a vigil by her daughter's bedside. Towards dawn, Anjani's pulse began to slow -- trauma filled the room as the parents stood petrified that they were about to lose this child too. Hands clasped, not daring to breathe, they stood helplessly by as the doctors revived her, afraid to believe she was in no danger till she was fully conscious and smiled her spunky grin at them.

While the world celebrated the end of the holocaust in Europe, Sharda and her family came to terms with Shalini's loss. By the time 1946 came around and brought Anil down with appendicitis, the Divans had become wearily matter-of-fact and faced his operation with a dull sense of acceptance. But the sixteen-year old recovered rapidly and went on to achieve academic honours at the University level.

Despite being plagued with asthma he had shown enormous grit and determination, at his parents' urging, to reach the position of All India Junior Badminton Champion in 1945. His trophies graced the shelves and cupboards in the apartment on Laburnam Road. He had also proved himself to be a first-class student. In a few years, on graduating from the University's college of law, he would be awarded the prestigious gold medal and go on to slowly build a successful legal practice and earn himself a reputation as one of India's leading lawyers.

Anjani had taken to swimming seriously and would leave early every morning for the Willingdon Club pool where Sir Chimanlal had arranged for her to have proper coaching. Determined, bent on achievement, Anjani ploughed her way through endless laps, learning in the process to blunt the pain of her sister's death and, more importantly, realising that in this world she was alone, she could depend only on her own hard work and reach her potential only through her own solitary efforts. It was her way of struggling against the blow fate had dealt her; in a corner of her self was slowly growing the conviction that only through achievement could one vindicate death. Baburao, whose nature was compassionate and deeply spiritual as opposed to his wife's pragmatic independence and almost

stern practicality, understood the girl's frenzied zeal and supported her with his encouragement. When a polio epidemic prevented her from swimming some time later, he turned her attention to tennis and she found a new outlet for her endless energy and inherited love of sport. To the trophies brought home by Anil were added the cups and ribbons, medals and shields from Anjani's swimming and tennis meets and competitions.

Sharda proudly revelled in her children's achievements. For the moment her career came second to her family. She had officially resigned from the post of registrar at the University for a brief period but continued to work with Lady Thackersey as and when time and need demanded and to travel with her on official trips when required. Often their work involved meeting socially prominent persons who were interested in being associated with and patronizing the University's activities. Some of these potential patrons were of "royal" lineage. India was still a land of kingdoms, not mere states, and the rulers of these kingdoms and fiefs were still all-powerful and maintained magnificent life-styles even more exotic than those of their forefathers. These rulers were on a different social plane altogether despite the fact that they may not all have been as well-educated or capable as some of the other leading citizens of the time for it was undoubtedly true that there was a distinct difference in being born to a title and acquiring one by virtue of one's talents and efforts. The late Sir Thackersey had been a close acquaintance of the Maharaja of Baroda and Lady Thackersey had kept up the relationship. She invited Sharda to accompany her when she called on the Dowager Maharani of Baroda in Bombay one afternoon. Entering the foyer of the house which was refreshingly cool after the searing heat they had been walking in outside, they were ushered into the dignified old lady's presence and stopped short for a moment in wide-eyed surprise, feeling they had stepped into another world and another time when they saw her sipping daintily and nonchalantly from a goblet of pure gold! When Sayaji Rao's heir was installed on the throne, Premlila and Sharda travelled together to Baroda. Sharda was still young in comparison to the luminaries present. Nevertheless, Premlila insisted that she read the citation at the grand *darbar* (audience) on behalf of the university. Clad in a pale blue silver-bordered georgette sari lent to her by her sister Kusum, Sharda pulled herself together and spoke her piece in a shy but determined manner. Other journeys followed. Travelling with

Lady Thackersey was undoubtedly an interesting and luxurious experience -- she never departed from Bombay without an entourage consisting of her personal maid, secretary and a cook for she was a strict vegetarian and it was Sharda who had to attend the official luncheon and dinner parties arranged by their various hosts.

As far as possible, she juggled her absences from home to coincide with the times that her family was busy elsewhere. As Anil and Anjani grew older and less dependent, Baburao and she began to go out occasionally in the evenings to a club where they met friends or to the homes of relatives and acquaintances who were close to them. Kusum and Dadda had purchased land in Juhu, a suburb of Bombay which was as yet very sparsely populated. They had built themselves a large house there and only a short distance away, the Gajjars too had bought property on which rose a graceful bungalow surrounded by gardens and looking out on to the beach and ocean. It became practically a ritual to be "out" of Bombay and enjoy the relative peace and quiet of the seashore on Sundays.

1947 -- it was to be a year of strong emotions. A free nation would be born on the night of August 14th as a tricoloured flag was unfurled and proudly hoisted at the stroke of midnight; the impassioned voice of a leader would awaken in his people an awareness of this great achievement, stirring them with the powerful words it pronounced.

Twelve months of hope, exhilaration, joy and for Sharda, shattering sorrow. In that year she would lose two of the people who were an integral part of her being -- her sister Kusum and her father, Sir Chimanlal. Kusum's death was caused ironically enough by the same phantom that had darkened the door of Sharda's home thrice already -- appendicitis. Kusum too, was operated on at home but died during the operation, of unexpected complications. For Anjani at fourteen, the shockingly sudden loss of Kusum who had been as a mother to her and within such a short time after Shalini's death, was devastating. She was with Dadda and Kusum in their home when Kusum was taken severely ill and an emergency operation had to be performed. She had helped to prepare the "theatre". When Kusum died so suddenly on the operating table, she clung fiercely to Dadda, absorbing his grief too, trying with all her youthful loving strength to prise him away from the corpse of the woman he had loved so deeply and who had meant so much to them both. Sharda and Baburao were away in Poona. By the time they arrived on the scene

Anjani had mustered enough strength to control her own emotions in their presence for she knew only too well the shock Sharda must feel at losing a sister under such circumstances.

It took a long, long while for the family to recover from this blow but their grief had not had time to heal before they were faced with Sir Chimanlal's fading health. The old man's spirit had broken with Kusum's death and by the end of that year the Setalvads grieved for two family members. Sharda, for whom Kusum had been her closest companion from childhood and Chimanlal the ideal she had looked up to all her life, reeled under the two blows fate had struck in such quick succession. As always, she sought solace in her work, anaesthetizing her pain in the only way she knew how, working with single-minded concentration until she was totally numb, distant in mind and spirit from the cause of her sorrow and able to handle it in the detached and dispassionate manner that so typified her personality.

It helped in no small measure that for the S.N.D.T., 1947 was a crucial year -- the year in which the Bill for the Charter of Recognition being granted to it was introduced in the Legislative Assembly. As a result of Premlila and Sharda's untiring perseverance to gain recognition for the S.N.D.T. a committee was appointed by the government under the chairmanship of Justice Divatia to examine the question of granting a charter of recognition to the S.N.D.T. Being an ex-Registrar, Sharda too was appointed a member of this committee. Questionnaires were circulated, several meetings and interviews held and papers passed through many hands until finally, the committee recommended recognition and the government introduced the bill in the legislative assembly. Sir Sitaram Patkar, Chancellor of the Bombay University, assisted in the drafting of the bill as he was a former judge. One day in the future the S.N.D.T. university's auditorium would be named the "Patkar Hall" in his memory.

The government of Bombay passed the S.N.D.T. Women's University Act in 1949 and finally in 1951 the university received Statutory Recognition. The S.N.D.T. Indian Women's University ceased to exist and the Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University came into being. Recognition at last -- a tremendous achievement! Sharda felt as though a massive burden had been lifted off their shoulders. Now government grants began to pour in, other universities began to recognise S.N.D.T. degrees and

the University Grants Commission offered them assistance as and when they needed it. Lady Thackersey was appointed the first Vice-Chancellor.

In 1952 yet another candle was lit on the S.N.D.T. cake. This one commemorated the opening of the new administrative building. The earlier ad hoc grants received through the efforts of Lady Thackersey and Sharda had paid for the purchase of the old military bungalow and the plot of land adjoining it. On that land had risen the structure that would house the administrative wing of the S.N.D.T. The building was formally inaugurated in 1952 by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

A proud moment for Premlila and Sharda -- in that instant, the tedious hours spent supervising the laying of practically each brick and stone that made the building that now stood complete before them were forgotten. So too were the painstaking calculations and budgetary economics -- the endless figures that had danced tantalizingly before their tired eyes were now transformed into the freshly painted reality that faced them. They had proved Annie Besant's statement to be true: "When it comes to the details of administration and the applying of principles to practice, you will constantly find that a woman's brain has a mastery of administrative details which makes her most valuable where organisation is concerned...it has been found that women's genius for detail is invaluable in the question of administration. It is found that she will look into details that never strike the mind of man." That building that she had "helped" build would be Sharda's domain for the next three decades. From it she would wield her wand as Registrar, Dean and Vice-Chancellor; entering its doors humbly and exiting them many, many years later, jubilant in the triumph of a job well done.

Sharda's relationship with Premlila Thackersey was not always placid and even-tempered. No two human beings can work and be together day after day in the same environment without disagreeing on some point or the other and so was the case with these two also. Often they disagreed with one another's views on policy and academic matters. The one would be stubbornly implacable and the other would stormily stick to her guns and fight for the cause under debate. The redeeming factor in their arguments however remained their common desire to do whatever was best for the University and this force integrated and overcame whatever minor points they may have disagreed upon. Both were women of very strong character but

they learnt to compromise and as time passed, both softened their rigidity of opinion for the greater good of the institution.

One afternoon, Sharda walked into Lady Thackersey's room, the fiery light of battle in her eyes and a much-handled set of papers in her hand. She had just been reading the proposal submitted to the S.N.D.T. by the Gujarat colleges that Hindi be offered as an alternative to English as a compulsory subject. Lady Thackersey was in favour of the suggestion but Sharda felt that it was essential to have English as a compulsory and not merely optional subject to be dropped completely and Hindi taken in its place. Sharda gave her reasons for favouring the continuation of English courses. She did not entirely subscribe to the nationalistic theory that the English language should be totally erased from the slate of Indian education. It was, in her opinion, an important and effective instrument of communication between Indians and the rest of the world and to allow the emotional pendulum of national pride to swing to such an impractical extreme in the opposite direction would be a grave mistake. Lady Thackersey listened but even as Sharda spoke, the expression on her colleague's face told her that her arguments were futile because nothing was going to sway the lady's opinion. The matter was brought up at the next senate meeting and Sharda listened dejectedly as, one after another, the staid and conservative members of the senate approved the motion.

Never one to give up on a permanent basis, she wheedled and coaxed and in a couple of years succeeded in having English restored as a compulsory subject at the conducted colleges. At a workshop for teachers of English, she said: "English is often represented as the main stumbling-block in the scholastic career of a student, especially at the University stage. In the altered context of the change of the medium of instruction at the University stage, we have got to find out the areas where students entering the University need special help. We at this University have been, for years, operating two course units for the teaching of English at the pre-University text-material and grammar level in an integrated form. We had to rest satisfied with whatever best was available in the market for our text requirements. Now we have launched our own Pre-University Class English Prose text, as also our own English Grammar and Tutorial Workbook for the First Year Arts course. We would not claim perfection for either of these publications, but would like to describe them as a first step or a beginning in a new direction. Our goal -- as

far as the teaching of English is concerned -- is to enable our students to overcome their initial weaknesses in the language, to comprehend it in both written and spoken form and gradually to express themselves in correct English."

1952 -- Sharda suddenly realised how the years had flown as she looked at Anjani one morning. In place of the chubby, curly-haired imp stood a slim and elegant, much sought-after young woman. Where was her little girl? Surely this self-assured and charming person could not so soon have taken her place? Then she took a rare moment to look critically in the mirror at herself and saw the changes time had wrought on her face and person, changes she had not had time to notice in the hectic pace she had maintained all these years. Almost before she knew it, she was sitting with Baburao, listening to Anjani telling them she had found the man she wanted to spend the rest of her life with -- Narotam "Nicky" Desai.⁷⁸ Sharda and Baburao had been, to an extent, instrumental in her meeting Nicky whose family was an old and respected one in Bombay. The young people had first been introduced over tea at the Cricket Club of India under the watchful gaze of Baburao's brother and his wife, following one of Anjani's tennis matches.

Although Sharda had known this decision was coming and welcomed it, she could not quite bring herself to absorb and believe it. Her daughter -- engaged to be married! And in March 1953 wed to the man she had met and fallen in love with; gone from home to start a new life. A few years later, Anil too would come and tell his parents that he had chosen the young woman he wanted to make his wife. No longer were the Divan "children" solely hers and Baburao's.

The S.N.D.T. had matured and Sharda with it. It was a different kind of maturing for her in 1955 when Baburao and she celebrated the birth of their first grandchild, Nicky and Anjani's daughter, Asha. She would have a different relationship with this granddaughter to the one she shared with her own daughter and as the child grew, Baburao and she enjoyed the moments spent with her, experiencing the joys of this very different responsibility. Now that the University was on a firm and rapidly progressive footing, Sharda took the time to relax in the evenings with Baburao. They would go to the Radio Club facing the waters of the Bombay harbour, talk, play an occasional game of cards with friends, just be with each other.

One morning as he sat holding a business discussion in the home of a friend, Baburao complained of feeling unwell. Within a short

while, as his condition did not improve, a doctor was sent for and the diagnosis made that he had suffered a heart attack. Sharda was contacted and rushed to his side. Medicine not having made the advances of today in the late 'fifties, she was advised that he not be moved home. She realised what true friendship really meant when their hostess concurred with the physician and insisted that there was no question of removing Baburao from her home until he was quite recovered and pronounced fit enough to leave. Deeply grateful, Sharda looked after her husband and breathed a prayer of thanks when he was well enough to be taken home. As they lived on the second floor in "Puri Villa" and Baburao was not allowed to climb stairs for fear of the effect the exertion would have on his strained heart, Sharda arranged for an extra servant to come and go at specified times of the day to help carry Baburao up the stairs in an armchair whenever they had to go out of the house. It was a time of stress and it showed in the new lines that had appeared on her face. Now there was a constant new anxiety for her to cope with -- Baburao's health.

All these years she had leaned on him for it was Baburao who was the guiding force behind her daring, he the backbone of her courage and the strength behind the face she showed the world. Without a man like him she would have found it well-nigh impossible to grow, to develop and bring out the best she had in her to give. He had nurtured the tiny tendrils of her ambition and allowed them to blossom into the sturdy plant they would one day become for he knew his Sharda, knew her temperament, her abilities, her reservations, her tremendous determination to become what she wanted to be and attain what she wanted to achieve. Perhaps he had known instinctively when he chose her to be his wife that she would never completely belong to him and the children they would create together -- a part of her would always remain separate, directed towards the career she had chosen for herself and, as it turned out, the thousands of young women groomed by her to take their place in society. He had known and yet he had chosen her for he also knew that her destiny was inevitably linked with his own.

Dr. D.K. Karve had founded the Indian Women's University in Poona in 1916. He had seen it transformed into the S.N.D.T. Women's University and governed by the hands of Lady Thackersey and Sharda Divan. In 1942, already a very old man, he watched Sharda organise the university's silver jubilee celebrations and now,

in 1958, the 102nd year of his life, he saw her organise a grand function at the Brabourne Stadium in her capacity of Secretary of the Dr. Karve Centenary Celebrations. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru,⁷⁹ presided on the occasion. In his speech, Nehru said: "...it is more important, if there can be any comparison, for the women of a nation to be educated -- than its men. I say it by way of emphasizing the importance of the mothers and daughters and sisters of a nation. One of the truest measures of a nation's advancement is the state of its women. For out of the women comes the new generation, and it is from their lips and from their laps that it begins to learn. Political revolution is important and economic revolution is still more important, but the most important of all is the social revolution in the people. It is in the measure that the social revolution succeeds that it provides the basis of the economic stability and progress. Women play the most important part in the social revolution." Sharda read out the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad's⁸⁰ message in Hindi to the gathered assembly. It was a proud day for the woman who had just been appointed Dean of the University's Faculty of Arts.

She had long been conscious of the fact that the University's responsibilities did not end with providing mere academic knowledge. Its primary objective was to mould the future citizens of a large democracy. It hoped to achieve this by providing opportunities to women for their intellectual, emotional, physical and social development. It was the Dean's task to take overall charge of student services which included student welfare activities in general and health, advisement, guidance, counselling and orientation programmes in particular.

As Dean, the responsibilities were greater but so too was the satisfaction in the work undertaken. Also a senate and syndicate member, Sharda was actively involved with not only the routine administration and planning of new projects and targets but also with the organisation of the various celebrations of the institution.

In 1963, she greeted Jawaharlal Nehru again and walked by his side when he came to open the new six-storey building that had risen on the foundation of two women's dogged persistence and mind-boggling energy. The ground floor of the building which was separated by a quadrangle from the administrative wing, thus forming a U-shaped unit, housed the Patkar Hall, named in memory of the former Chancellor of the Indian Women's University.

The Deanship was a period of development for Sharda -- it brought her in contact with the many eminent visitors to the university. She learnt much about the sacrifices that people like Abdul Ghaffar Khan,⁸¹ the "frontier Gandhi" and Coretta King, widow of Martin Luther King were making to achieve their ideals, by meeting and talking to these persons. She saw the zeal in their faces, their strength of character and their dedicated commitment to their beliefs and she shared a sense of association with these souls, each of whom had been born with a purpose and the courage to fulfil it.

More than a fair share of tragedy and sorrow had stalked Sharda in the course of her life -- one more scene was played out in 1963. Baburao who had never really fully recovered from the heart attack he had suffered in the late 'fifties was stricken again in 1963 with another cardiac crisis. This time he was in the Radio Club. Sharda received a frantic message and felt cold fear wrap itself around her as she rushed to the club and saw him slumped over in agonizing pain. Putting her panic aside, she mustered the courage to call a doctor, arrange for Baburao to be moved to the Hurkisondas Hospital and inform her family of what had happened. When he had suffered his earlier attack she had never doubted he would recover from it but seeing him now, the pallor of his face, the greyness of his skin and the sheen of perspiration coating his body as he lay helplessly hooked up to intravenous solutions in the starkly chill hospital, she knew and faced for the first time the grim fact that he might never get well again. It was a period of torture for her. For his sake she maintained an iron composure but they both knew that it was a question of time -- the days left to them became infinitely precious as he bore his illness with the dignity he had displayed all his life. They knew he was going and one evening he called for Nicky and Anjani and said: "Look after Mummy for me -- promise me you will always be there for her!" He had confidence in his Anjani, knew that she would never let her mother down even though she had never been as close to her in spirit and affection as she had been to him, her father. He spoke at length to Anil, the pride for this tall brilliant young lawyer who was his firstborn evident in his eyes and told him also: "Care for your mother when I am gone." And then he called Sharda to him and they talked quietly alone, bidding each other goodbye, knowing that a part of her was dying with him, knowing that in some strange way she would never be whole again or experience the completeness that their life together had given her.

Peacefully, he breathed his last.

Funeral arrangements had to be made -- Sharda came home from the hospital and prepared to receive the mourners who would come to pay their last respects to the man who had been her husband, her companion, her life. She told herself she must never forget the love of this man whose body now lay still and cold and lifeless before her. She must continue to be dedicated to the ideals he had wished for her, no matter what the years alone held, what the hardships or disappointments, the sorrows or tragedies; she must come through them all, no matter how long it might take or how hard the acceptance. Baburao had told her that she was to live on as though he were still there with her, she was never to feel that she was alone for he was with her in spirit -- always, inescapably.

Custom dictated that she no longer wear on her forehead the red "kanku" mark signifying her marital status. She called her children to her and told them: "I am not a hypocrite -- I am going to live a full life yet and I am going to continue to wear "kanku" from this moment on as I would were he still with me. I do not believe in shying away from doing this now -- I am not afraid to face society for what I believe in." Proud of her courage, Anil and Anjani agreed and led her out to the assembled friends and relatives, clad in a white sari, head held high, the "kanku" blazing defiantly in the centre of her forehead. She too had died inside herself, consecrated in spirit to Baburao but she showed the world an inscrutably calm face, her poise and demeanour in no way diminished by the tragic loss she had just suffered. Time would heal the wound; work would suture it closed.

In addition to being Dean of the Faculty of Arts she was the Chairman of the Library and Sports' Committees. A keen sportswoman herself she staunchly supported all related activities and personally saw to it that these areas of the university's curriculum were encouraged to grow and achieve their full potential. Having participated in sports herself from her schooldays she recognized that in this field too there lay a very important and special form of education and discipline. There was also a certain freedom and uninhibitedness associated with playing a sport which, she felt, was an essential tool for young girl students to rid themselves of the element of tradition-bound shyness and perceptible lack of self-confidence that had been subconsciously, perhaps unwittingly but nevertheless persistently inculcated in them since their earliest

childhood on account of their gender. Sports represented both an individual and a group activity, a concept of sharing and performance and pride in oneself and one's peers in an arena very different from the classroom. Girls who had felt that they would like to reach out and experience the thrill of participation and achievement in a team or individual sport that their brothers had always had access to would, vowed Sharda, have the opportunity to do so at the S.N.D.T. She would see to it that these dainty, diffident young creatures who entered the University would emerge from its chrysalis as strong and confident individuals, capable of facing the exhilaration of victory or the bitterness of defeat equally well.

Nor did she allow the institution to lag behind in academic terms. Under her guidance and in consultation with an expert from the United States of America, the Department of Home Science was established and expanded to become a regular college with an independent post-graduate department in 1959. The intervening years had seen a number of new colleges, departments and courses introduced to the university and its curriculum but the home science department was particularly Sharda's brainchild.

In an article titled "Home: Pivot of Society" she stated: "Women's educational problems do not seem to have received the consideration they call for: even the latest Education Commission does not seem to have come to grips with them and has left them largely untackled without going into any depth of study. That women's education, or rather literacy, has gone up considerably during the post-Independence period only reminds us of how neglected it was before and is certainly not a fulfilment of a goal.. Everybody is more or less theoretically agreed that an educated woman is a force to reckon with; that she is the pivot around which the home and the whole of the social structure moves; that educated womanhood is the measure of a country's advancement in culture; and finally that a full national consciousness cannot be attained if one of its major limbs -- the woman -- is ill-trained, ill-nourished and imperfectly utilized or exercised. But unfortunately this hardly goes beyond the stage of well-meant platitudes and precious little is being done to translate this theoretical concept into actual practice. A well-appointed home is generally where happiness begins and ends, and of this home the woman is the pivot. It stands to reason, therefore, that any programme of education for women which fails to take note of this fundamental fact is, to say the least, imperfect and unrealistic. Some

fifty years ago, when the S.N.D.T. Women's University was founded, it very rightly included in its special courses of study for women the then novel subject of "Domestic Science". It was to help both types of women -- those who were inclined to restrict themselves to the home as knowledgeable housewives and those, a little more ambitious, who wished to launch upon a career in the socio-economic field outside the four walls of the home. Domestic science has now grown into something much larger under the more appropriate and comprehensive modern name of Home Science or Home Economics, embracing everything that is essential to home-making and an intelligent home-maker.. Yet, certain popular misconceptions and false notions about Home Science will have to be cleared at the start to realize what Home Science truly is and what it sets out to achieve. One of the most malignant of these misconceptions is that it is nothing but a time-killing course in cookery and embroidery which women down the ages have known instinctively or with a little help from their grandmothers, free of cost. Those who cling to this view have only to examine the syllabus. The four-year course in Home Science, culminating in a B.Sc.degree comprises instruction in basic sciences like physics, chemistry, biology and microbiology and covers health, nutrition, foods, diet, clothing, textiles, mothercraft, child development and psychology, sociology, family relationships, home economics and enlivening the home environment and interior within a budget, besides instruction in the cultivation of language skills, including English which is compulsory....Indian women have known, through the ages, with a little more or less success, how to make a happy home and be excellent housewives. But times have changed, and along with the times, the age-old socio-economic structure is crumbling and yielding place to a new one where women participate more actively than every before. While this restructuring continues, Indian women have not been found too slow or unwilling to face this exciting challenge. While the home still remains the centre and woman the pivotal figure in home life, Indian women have progressed far beyond the proverbial stage of traversing the floor between the kitchen and the cradle. Without, however, leaving the kitchen or the cradle to chance, they have not only shown themselves to be willing and ready to know what an ideal kitchen is, or how the cradle is to be intelligently attended to, but they have proliferated in almost all life's fields. They have realized what at one time was only a romantic, poetic ideal -- the role of an equal and intelligent partner

of man. Education has played a decisive part in this bloodless revolution..Education for men and women need not have the same goals in view. The SNDT Women's University made this distinction from its very inception and hence the unorthodox introduction of domestic science in its curriculum. What was a primary course in domestic science has in recent years grown into a full-fledged faculty conducted by the SNDT Women's University. The curriculum is so planned as to provide a basis for general or liberal education but also with an eye to ensure the fullest development of the woman's intrinsic personality and individuality. As has been very aptly remarked: "The various sciences, arts, crafts and social studies might remain mere items of miscellaneous knowledge without transforming life into a more gracious pattern. A person is not educated unless he or she can see the relationship between basis purposes and instrumental efficiencies, unless he or she can hammer knowledge into wisdom and wisdom into action which is socially inspired." It is for this reason that, as a part of this discipline, students are initiated into home management by making them run a house on the college campus itself on pre-approved budgets. All this may generally amount to Home Science as a tool for home-making but it does not. It has twofold aims. A degree in Home Science actually opens horizons wider than what is strictly called a home. There are several job opportunities for Home Science graduates. Home Science as taught at the SNDT Women's University has not overlooked or ignored, while planning its curriculum and its practical teaching, the important fact that the accent will have to be on India, the Indian environment and Indian conditions. Nothing that goes against the grain of Indian culture could ever hope to succeed in India and hence a blind adoption of the western pattern of Home Science teaching is bound to be worse than wasteful. This discipline equips a woman with know-how to meet all the eventualities in her life in a home and a society in which she is then not merely a constituent part or accessory but the very pivot on which her whole little cosmos involving all those who are near and dear to her turns -- she is prepared for that enlarging, demanding experience. The SNDT Women's University, in launching this course much earlier than it became academically fashionable to do so, has -- to put it mildly -- been only too true to the cause of women's education for which it stands.³²

Every step on the path to growth and development is hard and

wearying but it leaves behind the lasting and indelible imprint of the feet that walk it. At one point owing to large budgetary deficits, the syndicate was on the verge of closing down the Nursing College. Three courageous women -- Premlila Thackersey, Jyoti Trivedi and Sharda Divan -- fought for its survival and their united stand averted the crisis at the syndicate level. That college "lived" and grew to become one of the finest institutions of its kind in the country, offering post-graduate courses for both teachers and nurses. It also profited from the laboured discussions concerning its future because once it had been decided that it was not to be abandoned, it received recognition and financing.

Moments of tension and anxiety were relieved by moments of tremendous excitement and anticipation when new ventures surfaced. So it was with the Juhu campus. An area of marshy land spanning roughly twenty acres had been acquired by the university thanks to Lady Thackersey and Sharda's combined efforts. It was time to find more space and to offer their services to a different part of Bombay's metropolis. It was an adventurous project and one that could only have been taken up and developed by two opportunists such as these two people -- funds would have to be raised for the swampland to be cleared, foundation pilings laid and only many years into the future would buildings stand proudly against that particular skyline and a red ribbon be cut to signal that the Juhu campus was ready for occupation by eager young minds.

It seemed to Sharda when she had time to pause and reflect for a moment that she had barely completed one monumental task before she was faced with another. 1966 saw Indira Gandhi elected Prime Minister of India. As Sharda led her to the inauguration of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the University, she thought: "The Indian woman is at last an entity in her own right! The daughter in an Indian family who, until the late 19th century, could not dream of peeping into a world of learning, far less attending school, has come into her own." Inaugurating the celebrations, Indira Gandhi paid tribute to the institution, its founder and the two stalwart women who had been appointed its guardians: "I salute the university not only as a pioneering institution and a centre of enlightenment but a gift from Dr. Karve.... I should like to quote what my father said to him on his hundredth birthday. 'We see the pomp and pageantry of kings and presidents and the publicity attending Prime Ministers. All this seems rather small and petty in your presence because you have

shown us in your life something which is more durable, almost timeless in its value -- courage and devotion and wisdom, persevering in spite of difficulties through long years of effort' Education has progressed -- almost spectacularly. Fifty years ago, Dr. Karve started this university with just five students. It is unlikely that in 1916 there were more than a dozen women graduates in each of our states, except perhaps Bombay, Bengal and Madras. Last year, we had 300,000 girls in colleges. Until two decades ago, teaching, nursing and medicine were the only professions open to educated women. Today, they are research scientists, engineers and district magistrates....University women cannot ignore the big gap which exists between educated women and other women not so lucky. To share with these less privileged women their knowledge and skills, to explain new ideas to them, to combat superstitions and to safeguard their interests should be the duty of the educated." As Indira's words fell into the attentively silent well of the auditorium, they evoked in Sharda's mind memories of the years past, of the never-ending and ceaseless determination that had created in her the strength to give to others and share with them that which had been given to her -- the opportunity and the environment to learn. She remembered the eager, young faces that she had encountered over the intervening decades and felt peace steal over her at the thought that education was now, at least in theory, every Indian woman's birthright as it had been hers. President Zakir Hussain graced the concluding function -- more memories to be preserved between the pages of Sharda's numerous albums.

1969 saw the culmination of Sharda's rise in the field of education. On Lady Thackersey's retirement, she was unanimously appointed Vice-Chancellor of the S.N.D.T. In a note to Lady Thackersey she wrote: "As your successor at the helm of the University I am confident that your training, your inspiring guidance and sincere cooperation in all matters will go a long way to sustain the multi-sided progress of the University in all respects." The fledgling institute that they had nurtured so caringly was now a great bird that had tried out its wings and was spreading them ever further.

From a child's point of view the building was impressive and the university immense. The grandchild walked into a large reception area graced by a bust of Dr. D.K. Karve, founder of the University. On both sides corridors branched off leading to the various offices. To the left lay the Vice-Chancellor's, Dean's and Registrar's offices.

The child walked down the passageway and there at the end was the vast room in which the sprightly, white-haired doyenne of the S.N.D.T., her grandmother, sat. The room was simply furnished -- a large desk heaped with files and papers, evidence of the amount of work to be got through before leaving at the end of the day, windows pouring sunlight and a great splash of colour on the wall facing the desk -- a vivid canvas painted by Anjani, gifted to her mother on her appointment as Vice-Chancellor. Both the room and the occupant of the desk projected a sense of awesomeness softened by the twinkle in the faded eyes of the woman looking affectionately at the child. It seemed to the child that there was a certain presence in the room, a sense of magnitude not incongruous with the considerable achievements of the somewhat stern-looking lady seated opposite her. Too young to understand the force and too personally involved with the central factor, the child merely smiled and asked her grandmother with youthful impatience when she would be ready to leave and go home with her. "Patience is a quality you must cultivate," came the prompt response and then, as she neatly initialled and stacked away papers in her "out" tray, "remember, there is a place for everything and everything has a place -- make sure you put it where it belongs or you will waste precious time finding it again."

The child listened and grinned impishly at this oft-repeated admonition of her own haphazard carelessness, not dreaming that the words would haunt her and remind her at odd moments of a childhood long past and the person who had shared it with her. This was her grandmother after all, a person not given to overt displays of warmth and affection but someone who was there like a rock to lean on; someone who made history come alive as she related anecdotes of her own youth and the world and India as they were then, who made one's country seem precious and worth fighting for when one heard about the struggles and deprivations of those who had fought to make her free for the children of her future; someone to live with when one's parents were away -- quite simply, a grandmother who was different from other grandmothers, no doubt, but one with her own very special brand of caring for those who belonged to her. This was the lady of two worlds -- mother and builder; the tightrope-walker who maintained the precarious balance between the roles of home-maker and career-woman with success.

Although she believed in equal opportunities for women and in furthering their education and having them enter fields hitherto inac-

cessible to them, Sharda also warned the young women whose futures were cast and moulded in the S.N.D.T. of the perils they would face if they did not keep an even balance as she had tried to -- "You were born to be daughters, wives, daughters-in-law, mothers -- first. Do not sacrifice this gift of nature while pursuing your dreams, for satisfaction and peace may elude you if you do not fulfil these duties and accord them the priority they deserve."

Dignity and integrity had been inculcated in Sharda from her earliest childhood. Preservation of these and the autonomy of the university ranked high on her list when she took over the Vice-Chancellor's seat. Tradition dictates that the Governor of Maharashtra be the Chancellor of the University of Bombay and its affiliated institutions. During Sharda's tenure as Vice-Chancellor which spanned nearly six years, the Chancellor received an anonymous letter concerning a teacher at the S.N.D.T. Instead of discarding it on the basis of its having been written anonymously, he took up the matter officially by writing to Sharda on the subject. His letter naturally went on record, putting the reportedly sordid case on file. Sharda made the appropriate enquiries, determined that there had in fact been no such occurrence as had been described in the letter and that none of her staff members was guilty of the reported offence. As the Chancellor had written to her in an official capacity she was forced to respond in the same vein. Her colleagues tried to dissuade her from doing so as they feared she may incur the Chancellor's displeasure by her act. Sharda could not be swayed. She wrote a polite letter in which she mentioned that she was hurt at the Chancellor's having lent credence to an anonymous communication and that she would have appreciated his having discussed it with her before sending her an official intimation which would unfortunately have to be filed, maligning the staff member who was purported to have been involved. The letter was hand-delivered -- she never received a reply.

The Vice-Chancellorship brought prestige and a tremendous sense of achievement but was at the same time, fraught with pitfalls and its own set of problems which had to be faced and resolved. Sharda had enjoyed a great advantage in working so closely with Lady Thackersey and in virtually having built the institution over which she now wielded control. Nevertheless, practically each day taught her new lessons and showed her that not even at the pinnacle was one immune to the rash of complexities that running an institu-

tion such as the S.N.D.T. involved.

Inaugurating the International Education Year at the University in June 1970, Sharda, addressing "her" students, said: "So far as the students are concerned, I want you to understand the term education in a wider perspective. Let me remind you that education is not a gateway to society, but it is the centre of society. It is not the preparation for life, but it is part of life. Secondly, I want you to make a sincere effort to learn cross-cultural courses so that a better understanding and tolerance of other people is developed. You can also help in improving the educational level of our country by extending your hands in activities such as the literacy campaign and social service. I wish that all of you shall not terminate your education after graduation or post-graduation but continue it even after you have settled in your domestic and professional life. Does it mean that you go on accumulating degrees? No, I want you to utilize your education in some such productive activity as may lead to your individual as well as society's betterment."

A number of "new" ideas and disciplines were introduced and implemented under Sharda's regime. Foremost amongst these were continuing education extension courses and the setting up of her other brainchild, the Continuing Education Department and Population Education Cell. Impressed by a statement made by Robert G. Sproul: "Nothing has handicapped the American educational plan more than the tendency of American citizens to think of schooling as a kind of vaccination against ignorance, and to consider that a concentrated dose of it in youth makes one immune for a lifetime. Actually the immunity lasts only a few years and unless it is renewed by periodic inoculations in study and thinking, one falls victim to a chronic type of ignorance which is often more dangerous than the acute form because the patient is competent to recognize the symptom but doesn't know that he has the disease", Sharda reflected that if this could be said of America, how much more true could it be considered for India and particularly for Indian women. Many of them, once having left school at whatever stage and under whatever circumstance, may never have thought or had the opportunity of picking up a book again or continuing the learning process so vital for their own fulfilment. In her introductory remarks on the occasion of the inauguration of an extension lecture series in March 1971, Sharda observed: "Today the university is launching one of its new programmes, that of Continuing Education. For a long time, the

University has been contemplating its implementation, and about two years ago, an Advisory Committee was set up to give consideration to this important facet of total education. In the present day context, the University is a centre for teaching, research and community service. Traditional functions can be described as teaching and research. However, for the last century or so the role of the University has been enlarged to include extension work as one of its important missions...The Women's University founded in the early twenties of this century by the revolutionary social reformer and emancipator of women, Maharshi Karve, and nurtured by the great visionary and philanthropist Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, was established to fulfil certain goals to meet the needs of those times. Over this period of five and a half decades, those goals are fulfilled. Today, the University is at a crossroad and has to meet the new challenges of social change. To meet this need, the University has decided to launch this new programme of Continuing Education for life-long learning which encompasses a wide range covering "the young adult entering into the challenging world of reality, the middle-aged and their needs for vocational refresher work, and the older age group who need not despairingly contemplate a diminution of vocational productiveness and an attenuation of those things which help us to live a life." The objectives of such a programme of further learning are many as it has a very wide connotation. Some of them are: achieving efficiency in a profession by reorientation at all levels, at certain periods; drawing woman power for productive purposes at a certain age for whole-time and part-time jobs; reviving threads of knowledge either through fresh courses or to continue a career after a lapse of time or for purely attaining personal fulfilment and avoiding frustration. However, for our programme, we have limited them to providing extension lectures and courses, professional training and re-training through short-term courses, seminars, workshops, providing consultative services to women's organisations, conducting research in related areas and providing guidance to those who have discontinued education and would like to pick up the threads at a later date. Due to the advantage we have of having a faculty which can teach through the regional languages, we would be in a position to offer these courses in Marathi, or in English, or in Gujarati by involving our various departments and colleges in this work...In conclusion, I would like to add that the traditional way of looking at formal education as a terminal process

should change as formal education is not terminal but preparatory. Whatever be the stage of schooling at which one discontinued one's formal learning, modern citizenship and living require that one start one's process of learning again to make our society a more enlightened one. The "knowledge explosion" changes the volume and content of things worth knowing so fast that the knowledge acquired soon becomes obsolete if not revised continuously. This programme offers new opportunities to acquire knowledge in later life...."

Sharda explained the logic behind the imperative need she felt to implement the concept and programme of continuing education for women. "As far as the education of women is concerned there is a decided trend all over the world that women want to go in for further education or continue education already acquired, if it was discontinued, at a certain stage beyond the time when they must give their full attention to the care of their children or families. This release begins around the age of thirty-five. With the break-up of the joint family and the emergence of nuclear families, especially in big cities like ours, this trend is being observed more and more in our country too as in the West. If proper facilities for education are available, the woman of today can give to the nation nearly half a life of productive contribution. The education needed may be either in the form of a return to a career or taking up a new career or preparing herself for community or national service or simply for developing her own personality. These may seem high challenges and high aspirations...let us hope that we shall be able to utilise this opportunity of giving education to all people and at all levels."

In a continuous wave of activity that originated in the sharp mind of the lady who now bore the title of "Vice-Chancellor, S.N.D.T. Women's University" the institution's Juhu Campus was developed further to gradually achieve its full potential. The institution of a separate Faculty of Fine Arts offering courses in painting, music, dance, sculpture, applied arts and crafts and dramatics was proposed as was the shifting of the Faculty of Education and its Practising School to the new campus. The Juhu campus would also have a Faculty of Home Science and a Faculty of Arts. On the old premises, more specialized courses were introduced in the home science and nursing fields. A nursery school was opened to serve as a laboratory for the practical and first-hand training of the home science students. Unobserved by the toddlers, students were able to watch them and study their behavioural and psychological patterns. Library science

and a women's polytechnic were incorporated into the curriculum offered by the institution. Departments were developed and grew to become separate colleges and faculties. In keeping with the times and the needs and demands of each generation of students to enter its portals, the S.N.D.T. too tried to catch up with the winds of change and sought, under the watchful eye of its dynamic head, to adapt itself to them while preserving its own character.

Interesting personalities were invited to lecture in different departments and visiting professors encouraged to come and share their special knowledge with the students. The staff members who had been with the S.N.D.T. for many years, the "old hands", were gently persuaded to "modernise" and the new young members who joined were discreetly instructed to conform with the values of the institution they were now a part of.

Sharda was privileged to have loyal and devoted staff members as colleagues during her tenure as Vice-Chancellor. Sincere, dedicated and efficient men and women contributed to Sharda's success. All were members of a winning team -- stalwart faculty members stood by their superior, sympathizing with the difficulties she faced and supporting her decisions to find optimum solutions. There was never enough time, space and money to do all that could and should be done -- what they did have in common and what did not fail them was a tremendous sense of optimism, a belief that somehow the means would come when needed. Countless hours were spent unstintingly by these individuals in thinking, planning and providing solid bases on which to expand, improve and grow. They were Sharda's "family" and acted as such, never letting her down, accepting her fallibility and admiring the innate sense born of long experience that allowed her to intuitively make positive decisions for the University.

The six years of Sharda's Vice-Chancellorship were, as had been all the days of her life in one way or another, memorable. There was the convocation when she welcomed her brother Motilal, her much-loved "motabhai" as the Chief Guest of the day. They stood together on the dais, these two, the eldest and the youngest of the Setalvad clan, each of whom had reached the top in their chosen professions, both white-haired now but with ramrod-straight backs and heads held high with the Setalvad stamp of indomitable spirit. As a child Sharda had resented Motilal's often high-handed and autocratic attitude towards his younger siblings, she had playfully taunted him

on more than one occasion but now as she stood at his side and looked at him she saw the affectionate elder brother who had guided her through her earliest childhood with the maxim of "acquiring knowledge and using it without allowing it to rust". Twice in her career she had received members of her family at convocations -- as Registrar she had delivered a speech in the presence of her father when Sir Chimanlal as Chancellor of the Bombay University had presided over the fledgling university's convocation; today it was Motilal who smiled down at her as they were seated in their places on the stage.

As Vice-Chancellor, became a member of the Advisory Committee of the All India Radio University Programme, the Indian University Association of Continuing Education and the National Council of Education Research Training. She also found herself appointed an Honorary Colonel Commandant of the National Cadet Corps of the Government of India. She was never one to miss an opportunity to instil the value of discipline in her students. On a grey, overcast morning, cadets from the Maharashtra National Cadet Corps paraded on the open rectangular grounds of the University. As Sharda took the salute it began to rain heavily and one of the organisers rushed up to her with an umbrella. Indicating the soaked cadets she refused the umbrella's protection and stood stiffly to attention in the pouring rain till the parade was over.

She had to travel often to preside over seminars, meetings and conferences. The map of India took on a new dimension for her as she visited Delhi, Agra, Chandigarh, Udaipur, Patna, Baroda, Gujarat, Aurangabad, Kolhapur, the Benares Hindu University, Poona, Tirupati and Madras and was taken sightseeing after officialdom was dispensed with.

In Hyderabad she discovered to her amusement that some of the tapestry gracing the Nizam's Palace was the same as that which used to decorate the Setalvad drawing room! The sight of the faded threads recalled vignettes from her childhood in that gracious home -- her mother pouring afternoon tea from her elegantly chased silver teapot in the pink salon known as "my lady's boudoir"; the wide-eyed little girl at her first garden party being introduced to the guests of honour -- Lord and Lady Willingdon. Images flitted haphazardly through her mind and she thought ruefully of how time had waved the wand of change and wiped the slate of that other stately world clean.

In 1972, a dream Sharda had often spoken of to Baburao came true. As newlyweds they had been separated when he went to the United States to study at the Columbia University. After long years of waiting it was now her turn to step on to those shores -- the irony was that she would go alone. That year the Inter-Regional Expert Group Meeting convened by the Social Development Division in connection with the Status of Women Section of the Human Rights Division at the United Nations in New York was on the subject of "The participation of women in development". Sharda was invited to attend and did so as the only expert representative from India.

Knowing that in addition to hotels she would also be staying in private homes in the West, she who had been a strict vegetarian all her life, introducing only the occasional egg to her diet, now decided she must conform with the times and promptly proceeded to "train" herself to eat chicken and lamb so that she would not inconvenience her hosts!

Europe was on her agenda enroute to the United States -- her spry figure undertook a whirlwind tour of Paris and Geneva where she summoned up scraps of the schoolgirl French learnt from Mme. Pettier nearly five decades -- almost another lifetime! -- ago and flew finally from Rome to New York. Overwhelmed by these venerable bastions of European culture and history she smiled when she landed in New York, unfazed by its brash, impudently soaring skyline. Following the meeting at the United Nations she visited the Columbia University, the University of Minnesota and the Home Science College in Iowa. On the way home she stopped over in Great Britain where the British Council in India had arranged for her to see the Polytechnic Women's College and the Sussex University. She returned home bursting with new concepts born of all she had seen, heard and learnt in the course of her travels.

In a radio talk titled "India of my dreams" in September 1972, she said: "...An individual's dream often takes a lifetime to materialize. The dream of a sub-continent like our country may take years, nay ages. The question at the present historical moment of our country, after twenty-five years of independence is, how far or near are we to the full realization of this dream? ...Education at the primary, secondary and collegiate level has proliferated in remote corners of our country with the result that there are thousands of schools and colleges all over the country...People at the top are trustees of the interests of the future generation. Let not the coming generation blame

them for their acts of omission and commission. It is not too late to mend, to rethink, to retreat where necessary, and return to basic reality, for after all, a dream is a dream but it should be founded on or converted into reality...I believe that India has an untapped reservoir of potential and its greatest asset is its youth, who if properly guided and given the opportunity, would rally round and shape the future of India, making our dream a reality in the not too distant future."

A long and distinguished career would end with Sharda's retirement from the Vice-Chancellorship in 1975. She was seventy-two years old and the Maharashtra University Act debarred her on the basis of age from standing for election for a third term. But her ties with the University she had babied and reared to its present proportions would not be severed completely. She would remain a senate and syndicate member for a number of years to come and she would continue to maintain a keen and active interest in her "child's" growth.

An Indomitable Will and Spirit, 1976-1991

"Life is the connection between birth and death. This connection is a gift from God. To use the gift to its greatest potential is our duty." Sharda Divan

The kind words of farewell had been uttered and the bouquets presented at the meeting held to usher out Vice-Chancellor Sharda Divan and welcome her successor to the post, Madhuri Shah.

Sharda's private files and papers had been tidily stacked in cardboard cartons to be carried away, her personal belongings removed from the office that had been her "home" for the past six years.

She stepped into her car and officially drove away for the last time from the gates of the university to which she had dedicated nearly fifty-four years of her life.

What did she feel in those moments? A sense of pride and well-being in her achievements or a momentary pang for all that she would have still liked to do had time not run out for her?

Where had all the years gone, she mused, as she settled back against the worn leather car-seat, feeling suddenly old and worn herself now that the daily need for constantly giving of her boundless energy was ended? Whence, she wondered, had come the will and the vigour to push herself to her utmost limits and do what destiny had asked her to? Not just her own destiny but that of all the girls and young women whose lives had been a part of hers and for whose futures she had sacrificed much of her own present over the past decades. Her years with the SNDT had been one long roller-coaster ride of intense involvement and excited anticipation. Surely that wellspring of zest and verve was not going to completely cease to flow from one day to the next just because the title of Vice-Chancellor was no longer hers?

Wasn't this sudden lost feeling, this sense of being cast adrift from a familiar anchor, in itself a new challenge to be faced? And did she not thrive on challenge, on confronting adversity? Yes, she accepted that it would be difficult to break a routine fostered over almost five decades. It would be hard to remain at home all day knowing that there was no longer an office she had to go to nor the family of colleagues she had come to look upon as her own. There would be lonely hours to fill and a deep sense of regret that her husband was no longer alive to share them with her.

On the other hand, were there not the many other facets of life, that she had had to sideline perforce, now waiting to be discovered? Was there not scope in other as yet unexplored areas outside the university walls for the intelligence and organizational ability and above all, experience, that was hers to contribute? Individuals, apart from the generations of women students she had thought of unceasingly for so many years, who could benefit from the extent of her knowledge and talent for guidance?

No longer governed and restricted by a daily "diary" or agenda, she now allotted the lion's share of her day to pastimes that had often eluded her during the frenetic years of her professional ascent. She read, she took long walks in a nearby park, she travelled. Many an enjoyable hour was spent in the company of her grandchildren whose number had by now grown to five. She moulded the minds of those young individuals by her amazing ability to make the experience of learning fun. A pack of cards or a round of those age-old favourites, board and dice games, became the tools for the children sitting around her ancient bridge table to learn rapid mental -- no fingers! -- math calculations. The kitchen table became a magical place to whisk and roll out and mix and create delightful concoctions which nevertheless had to be perfect in shape and consistency. While they played, she taught -- subtly but firmly, a word here, a phrase there, intentionally used for the maximum possible effect. Attention to detail -- total concentration -- perfectionism; these were the values she instilled in the eager minds and upturned faces that looked to her to learn. She always had a verbal quiz prepared on current affairs and world events; woe betide the little person who had not looked at the newspaper headlines that day! "If you live in this world," she would say, "you must know all that you possibly can about it. How else will you discover the reason for your being here at all?" Certainly, her own *raison d'être* -- the SNDT -- continued to

remain an important part of her life. She now worked at a large desk in one corner of her bedroom. Papers from the university were piled side by side with prospectuses pending a decision for her investment portfolio and invitations to participate in a student seminar or a women's conference. Mail was answered systematically, not by a secretary, but in her own neat hand. On the average day a half a dozen calls continued to filter through from various departments of the University, asking for advice or her point of view or merely a reassuring comment. Many of the colleagues and staff members she had worked with came to her with their personal problems for they knew she would now have the time to listen to their troubles and unravel the tangles they found themselves enmeshed in. Be it one of the teachers or a department head, a member of the clerical staff or the office-boy; each had his or her own anxious tale to relate and who better to approach than this seasoned veteran? It never failed to amaze Sharda how, despite her harsh chiding of the self-made mess they found themselves in and her reputation for being strict and stern where carelessness and haphazard impulsiveness were concerned, these people, most of whom had been inducted and trained by her at some point of their tenure with the University, still trusted her and looked to her for solutions to the dilemmas they grappled with. The files and papers marked for her attention as a member of the SNDT's Syndicate Executive Council as well as the proposals, data and agendas of the working committees she was actively involved with, she read with avid interest and the same degree of commitment she had always felt. It heartened her, when she attended Senate and Syndicate meetings, to return to the familiar premises and know that she was, despite retirement, still a contributing factor to the plans for the university's administration and expansion. Expand it did, and at the same accelerated pace that had been set by its founders. In 1979 Sharda was amongst those who had advocated and who now applauded the addition of an Open University Programme to the SNDT's activities within the framework of a department of correspondence education. This too had been a concept she had dreamt of and actively promoted, for it was a logical progression of the Continuing Education programme earlier introduced, affording women students above the age of twenty-one the possibility of joining the mainstream of education to obtain a regular Bachelor of Arts or Commerce degree course by being judged on the basis of an entrance examination to test their linguistic ability.

and general knowledge rather than the consideration of their possessing a school leaving certificate. Family life or unfortunate forces of circumstance often impinged on a young woman's pursuit of education, compelling her to abandon her studies and, often, reluctantly turn to caring for the home and husband and children she had acquired by virtue of orthodox social dictate. Or there were the others who would have liked to attend school regularly and earn their laurels to enter a university but whose parents could not afford to have them do so. The three-year correspondence course, which provided such women with reading material and some lecture classes for papers covering the prescribed course units, proved to be a lifesaver in terms of reaching beyond the pale of the home and all that it represented and being able to stand on one's own feet, not just economically with the prospect or reality of a job or profession but from the far more important aspect of understanding and developing the value of self-esteem, despite the paucity in family income. The more fortunate students were able to attend the contact lectures held for them. Those unable to do so were provided with lecture cassettes to supplement their reading material.

An examination reform unit had earlier, after much debate, been set up with the assistance of the University Grants Commission with the aim of analyzing question papers and evaluating their character and language with a view to improving the setting of examination questions and assessing answers. Training programmes in testing practices and the development of instructional objectives, improvement of syllabi and aiding teaching methods through studies and research and publishing handbooks, research monographs and brochures on the multiple aspects of examination reforms proved valuable.

In a gradual and phased manner, the university had also created a base for social work and welfare services through the conduit of an adult education programme, rural work, extension activities and community development programmes including the setting up of a centre for rural development.

In 1983, Sharda turned eighty. It was a memorable occasion and its celebration was bound neatly and preserved in the pages of a special issue brought out on the occasion by the Gujarati magazine, *Sajani*. Congratulatory messages arrived from all over the country. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wrote:

Smt. Sharda Divan has been one of our foremost educationists. Her work as Registrar and then as Vice-Chancellor of the SNDT University is well known. A long list of students and colleagues remember her guidance with gratitude. My greetings and good wishes to her on her 80th birthday.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's letter read:

Smt. Sharda Divan has been a pioneer in women's education. I know that she has made a valuable contribution to educational thinking and conduct of educational institutions. I am happy that she is being honoured for her long and valued services to the field of education particularly that of women.

A specially formed "Sharda Divan Felicitation Committee" of the SNDT welcomed the woman who had been instrumental in the University's creation, by holding a special felicitation function in her honour. Speeches were made by colleagues, friends and family -- warm words of admiration and affection spoken.

Perhaps the most true and touching of tributes was the speech made by Dr. Madhuriben Shah, Sharda's successor to the Vice-Chancellorship and later Chairman of the University Grants Commission of India, for it typified the person she spoke of: "Whenever I think of her, I am reminded of perfection. Somebody mentioned that her sari never creases, that her clothes never crumple. She has always disciplined her own life and maintained an equanimity of mind, an interest in art and an interest in sport, to become an all-round personality which speaks volumes for a harmonious development of one's own self. We all talk about it as a purpose of education but few of us are able to achieve it. And she is the embodiment of that sort of culture which is now getting extinct to some extent, but it is this culture, it is this strength, it is this ethos, this word ethos which she brings with herself, which is the sustenance for any institution -- be it any social institution or be it the Vanita Vishram or be it the SNDT University -- with which one is connected. I have never seen her desperate. I have never seen her perturbed. She always takes things in her stride and rises to the occasion. When the crisis comes, it's a challenge to her. What do you expect -- born in the stern and strict discipline of the Setalvad family? As I said earlier, they don't even stoop to conquer! And with the discipline, the

strength of character. Shardaben has brought to this University a grace and charm and deep concern. A quest for excellence has been her forte and she has never touched anything into which she did not put her heart and soul and the SNDT University is a living monument of her effort -- not just as Vice-Chancellor for two terms, madam, for we too have been Vice-Chancellors for two terms -- but from the early days when you were Registrar and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, a member of the Senate and the Syndicate until you reached the Vice-Chancellorship. All these years that you have given to this University will remain as a monument -- a landmark in its life."

Sharda, who normally kept a tight rein on her emotions, forcing herself always to adhere to the strictly practical side of life, was touched and overwhelmed by their efforts on her behalf. Her work, her devotion to the cause of women's education that she had fought and crusaded for all her life had not been in vain.

The Indian girl child was now being born and growing into young adult womanhood in a new era that was so very different from the one of Sharda's early years. Time and a generation of hardy pioneering stalwarts had enabled the little girl of today to be free, to be cared for, to be treated on a par intellectually with the male members of her family. True, this was by no means the case in every Indian household and particularly not for the average rural community. Nevertheless, the pattern was undoubtedly changing. A formal system of education did exist for the female child and parent who wished to avail of it. Even in the most poverty-stricken village hut deep in the Indian heartland could be found at least one tattered and dog-eared book in the hands of a tiny girl with a bewitching grin and stringy pigtails. So too, the lopsided alphabet letters scratched determinedly by small, grimy fingers into the heat-baked soil of the village school's courtyard in places where the slate-board and chalk piece were still unaffordable luxuries.

In subsequent years, Sharda allied herself closely with projects intended to put the university on institutional cooperation terms with both national and international organizations. The cooperations were wide-ranging and covered subjects as diverse and varied as communication and education technology, nursing education, education management and training potential women leaders in the skills of university management.

Whether she was addressing schoolchildren or playing the role of

the chief guest or the guest speaker or panelist at meetings of educational institutions, social welfare associations or youth clubs, Sharda spoke out vociferously against the subtle domination that still prevailed in many Indian homes where the woman was manoeuvred into doing more than her fair share and made to bear the burden of being both a home-maker as well as a career professional without the adequate support and understanding of a husband or family elders. It was not just the young, but the senior citizens too, to whom she spoke her mind. Humourously she berated them, knowing that age was the factor they shared in common with her, requiring them to hear her out, albeit sometimes unwillingly, and she conveyed the message she had to impart in no uncertain terms when given the opportunity to do so.

"Why do you allow yourselves to become dependent, to intrude constantly in your children's lives?" she asked a group of middle-aged and elderly women who had invited her to come and speak to them. "Can you no longer remember the mother-in-law who plagued your every waking moment with her harping and her criticism? What have your children done to deserve the same treatment from you? Be a friend to them, be there to help when they ask you to, look after your health so that they do not have the strain of caring for you because of your own neglect or a self-pitying temperament. Remember, you have lived your life -- they are yet to live theirs -- allow it to be a good one." And then, pointedly looking at some of the more ungainly members of the group who had acquired more than their respectable share of middle-aged spread, she quipped: "Take pride in yourself, in your appearance. Keep fit and alert in body and spirit if you want to earn your children and grandchildren's respect. It is no longer enough to have the title of grandma -- you have to be one in the true sense of the word if they are to genuine!... want you to be a part of their lives and not just constitute a tiresome burden!"

Practising what she preached, she herself remained the sprightly, keenly inquisitive individual she had always been, even though she was by now halfway through her eighties and a great-grandmother twice over. One afternoon as she sat piecing together a jigsaw puzzle with her great-granddaughters, showing them patiently how to see and know its intricate shape, the elder of the two piped up in her childish treble: "Oh! I like to learn things with you!" It was the ideal tribute for one who had given an entire lifetime to learning in order that she may share the joy she had derived from knowledge with

succeeding generations.

January 1988 and the occasion a special one -- the celebration of her eighty-fifth birthday. Women, generations of women -- the room was filled with them, with their feminine aura, the myriad scents and colours and tones and mystical emotional vibrations that coalesced to create their essential nature. Brightly hued chiffons whispered daintily to crisply starched homespuns, exotically made-up faces mirrored soap and water freshness. They were all shapes and sizes, they came from different backgrounds, varied social strata. A flock of brilliant butterflies and matt moths. The conversation ranged from concentrated intellectual discussion to lighthearted gossip -- seemingly endless, consuming, all important. Then watches were consulted, they drifted towards the rows of chairs and settled down, their attention now focused on the woman they had come to see, hear, admire, perhaps emulate. They had a century in common with her -- it was the era that was radically, vastly different. Time continued its relentless, inexorable march forwards and the seconds ticked on.

"Every moment that is lived makes history", she said, "so make the most of it for that moment never returns. Do what is right and do what your strength and capability permit. Do it with determination and total dedication and involvement or do not do it at all. Whether you are rolling out a "chapati" or combing your child's hair or dressing up to go to a party, have the same enthusiasm for each task. Work is pleasure. This is the gist of education. This will make you a *karma-yogi* -- one who undertakes work for its own sake, translating it into perfection."

She paused for a moment, looked directly at her audience and a tiny smile quirked the corner of her lips as she continued: "Seeing so many of you, well-groomed, full of confidence, pursuing some goal, I feel -- how different the scene is today! I feel very heartened and enthusiastic and yet concerned. When I was young the accent in our times was firstly to gain independence from foreign rule and secondly to enrich the country of our birth that we may emerge from the oppression and domination of colonial rule as a leading nation with none subjected to any kind of pressure. The first objective was achieved in 1947 at the cost of many lives and the partition of our sub-continent. The second, I fear, has eluded us to a great extent. A large number of people, even young men and women, are today subjected to economic, mental, physical and religious persecution. They

are expected to unquestioningly obey traditions and customs that are no longer relevant in the context of their lives for they stand on the threshold of a new millennium, a future entirely different in experience to the past that was lived by their parents and elders. Therefore, it should be our endeavour to contribute something tangible and everlasting in the spheres that are weak and remove our shortcomings to achieve freedom in the true sense...."

Holding up her hands in an instinctive appeal for understanding, unconsciously straightening her already erect posture, she said: "Life is full of pain and pleasure. If you can learn to rise above the shocks of life without becoming bitter, despondent, depressed --and share your enthusiasm and joy with other people around you, you will go a long way. Here, I would like to share with you a favourite maxim of mine that I have, over the years, often repeated to women like yourselves: Keep dreaming of better tomorrows but in achieving them do not compromise your principles. Work for them and while you work, do not forget the purpose of your births. You were born to be daughters, wives, daughter-in-laws, mothers first. Do not sacrifice this gift of nature while pursuing your dreams, for satisfaction and peace may elude you if you do not fulfil these inherent duties. Above all, give of yourself. Use your every talent and skill -- hone it to perfection and let not just yourself but others around you benefit from that perfection."

Her voice, still vibrant, still strong, belying her years, rang cleanly through the room. The listeners, women young and old, leading different lives, following different paths and hopes and dreams heard her speak -- and they listened spellbound to what she had to say. Some of them were the eager, determined professionals and career-oriented individuals of today's generation, some remained the wives, mothers and daughters of tradition and convention but as she spoke, her words touched each one with an indefinable sense of closeness, of understanding and sharing, making them aware that here was a woman who knew and understood them, who had lived some part of their own lives, was a part of their own selves.

At the close of her address, they rose as one, offering her a standing ovation in praise of her achievements as a woman activist, educationist and social worker.

Returning home, she walked up the steep wooden stairs now protesting their age just as her body sometimes protested hers and entered the door of her apartment on the second floor. Walking into

her bedroom, she laid down the bright blooms she carried, encased in translucent cellophane and vivid streamers of ribbon, on her desk and then sank into the reclining armchair opposite the bed, absently rubbing a hand over her aching back.

What, in the final analysis, she asked herself, had she truly done to deserve the accolades showered upon her that afternoon? She and the many others of her generation and ilk, those nameless, faceless daughters of India who peopled her villages and towns and cities. They had proven to be equally, if not more strong and determined in the face of adversity as Sharda herself, but the efforts of many had remained unsung and unrecognized. The applause accorded to her belonged to them all.

What was the status of women's education in her country today? What changes had been wrought by time, by history and by each new generation?

In 1916, a university had been established with the intention of protecting hapless child-widows and destitute women from the tyranny imposed on them by society. Educating the first five students who enrolled had meant teaching them to fight age-old customs and hidebound traditions and simultaneously helping them to acquire the wherewithal to become economically independent, to assert their right to learn, to prove that for a woman to step out of the invisible boundaries of her home to acquire knowledge and to work to earn a livelihood did not imply the dereliction and neglect of her household and motherly duties.

The vision of its founders, reflected Sharda, lay in the fact that they had battled to make their institution unique in the ways that were crucial for women because it was meant to be a sanctuary for the female sex. A world where women felt that they came first in terms of consideration and respect, where their knowledge of English or the lack of it was neither ridiculed nor essential since lessons were conducted in the regional vernacular, and where they were not obliged to be physically present in order to gain the knowledge they were offered, for this university, the first in the country to experiment with distance education, allowed them the rare privilege of studying "privately" at home.

The SNDT had been adamantly spawned and reared to free the spirit of those women who had little or no hope of or access to education. Its emblem, the goddess Saraswati (deity of education) seated on a lotus flower and the motto *sanskrita stree parashakti*

translated to mean "an enlightened woman is a source of infinite power" was designed to make them conscious of their responsibilities and give them the self-confidence to realize and exploit their individuality to its full potential. This in turn would equip them to enter areas from which they had earlier traditionally been excluded and, at the same time, identify and reveal the new career opportunities emerging as a consequence of India's industrial growth and modernization.

How much, wondered Sharda, had been achieved? Had the knowledge, that these women were given, succeeded in penetrating the tightly-fastened shutters and musty recesses of minds made stubborn by the illogical customs of yesteryear? Had, as Gandhi had intended, braver, wiser, succeeding generations of women been unleashed on the subcontinent? If, as she believed, they had, how had the Indian male responded to this exodus of women from their age-old exile in the secluded and sheltering cloisters of tradition?

The Indian man had, she felt, for the most part, not reacted as positively as he could have. The majority still flaunted their belief that a woman's place was in the confines of her home. A home, within the claustrophobic four walls of which her husband could keep her barefoot and pregnant in the eternal and unflagging hope of producing a male heir, allowing her to cross the threshold only when and for the reasons that he decreed she do so. A human asset that he could possess and proudly display on a whim. A characterless, spiritless, tremulously cloying being, paradoxically expected to show grit and determination when it came to beating the odds that faced her as a daughter-in-law, a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law.

A woman who was a career professional was still easily criticized for stepping on a man's toes at work -- was she not the poacher on his preserve? Was she not the reason for his remaining on the same rung of the promotion ladder while she efficiently forged her way to occupy the seat that he believed should have been his? There were the husbands who resented their wives' success; who felt inferior and whose fragile egos shattered at the realization that while they were only able to bring home the bread, it was their wives who brought home the cake. Such men created strife and tension within the household and it took its toll, inevitably, of their wives and children.

The picture was not all bleak though. Encouraging to note were the increasing number of exceptions to the rule. The husband of the nine-to-five woman who showed his caring by having dinner

prepared and the children taken care of when she exhaustedly let herself in through the door at dusk. The man who was secure enough emotionally not to consider his wife's pay-packet to be a bone of contention. The man who put his wife above himself, respecting her as a thinking being, an intelligent individual, acknowledging that he would be lost without her being a part of his life, a life shared on equal terms. The father who felt that his daughter's education merited top priority.

And, to be absolutely fair, one had to concede that women too had undergone a dramatic transformation. Many young women displayed an arrogance and aggressiveness in asserting themselves that was somehow disproportionate. Working mothers succumbed to the pressures exerted on their time and energy, ushering in the age of the day-care creche or "latchkey" child, for in India too, domestic help was becoming harder to come by and the once invincible joint family system was crumbling under the onslaught of married couples whose combined earnings permitted an independence incomprehensible to even the immediately preceding generation. Many women too were harder, tougher, colder individuals who had lost their intrinsic femininity in the single-minded pursuit of ambition that was not entirely altruistic in its goal.

Why, wondered Sharda, had the idealism and the quest for excellence of her generation not survived the years? Or was she mistaken and was it still apparent in the same measure in the liberated young women who peopled today's world? Were their needs the same or had today's society transformed the ethics and principles of need-based education into a greed-based springboard from which one could make a quick leap to material fortune? Did the sheer, uninhibited joy of learning for its own sake and not with any ulterior motive exist for today's schoolgirl and young collegian as it had for her?

Life was not just different but difficult, she was forced to admit. The educational policy had in many ways put paid to the concept of individuality by burying schoolchildren under an avalanche of information that was not necessarily relevant to their lives as adults. As a consequence, these youngsters grew up wary of the system and the traps it was wont to spring on them. Backs burdened by the weight of the books they carried to and from the classroom daily, they shuddered as they sloughed off the traumas of endless examinations in which their work was subjected to scrutiny by unknown, faceless

persons who tended to be callous and insensitive for they had not the time nor the patience to fairly evaluate the tons of paper they were confronted with.

Had India changed so drastically? In some ways, it had. The simple, clean, single-minded and honest pursuit of an edifying goal that had, for Sharda's generation, once been the norm, had, somewhere along the years, become sufficiently perverted by economic necessity and the insidious entry of politics into practically every nook and cranny of daily life, creating a new depth and dimension of self-serving ambition and financial gain.

She smiled somewhat ruefully as she thought of the independence Lady Thackeray and she had enjoyed in the administration of the university and the support rather than the interference that had been given them. It was an indisputable and ugly fact that today it was the political mandarins and state and central government bureaucracy who, to a great extent, wielded the purse strings and they had neither qualms nor hesitation in asserting their control. A phenomenon that more often than not deterred and irrevocably damaged the institution selected to be its victim.

Yet was it not equally true that the foundations of an essentially value-based structure can never be weakened? That the sheer involvement and caring of the men and women who have pieced together the edifice are the mortar that holds it firm. That what is created with patience and sacrifice and honest and good intent survives far longer than just the lifetime of the individual who created it. It is this knowledge of an institution's strength and invincibility that makes the time and effort and personal commitment expended on it worthwhile.

1991 -- and a reason more special than just another birthday of her own to celebrate. Sharda turned eighty-eight and the S.N.D.T. began its Platinum Jubilee Year. In a span of seventy-five years the number of five students on the university's first campus had grown to forty thousand spread over the eleven undergraduate colleges and thirty-eight departments offering the post-graduate diploma or degree level of education of the university and its twenty-one affiliated colleges.

In February of that year, Sharda stood as serious and erect as ever, the seriousness belied attractively by the twinkle in her faded eyes, to receive the bearer of a torch carried all the way from Hingna in Pune, where, seventy-five years ago, one man had begun to spin a

dream.

A dream that the woman who stood here today had helped bring to fulfilment. A dream that was now reality for the women of India.

Notes

- 1 Lyrics of the song, "Some of us belong to the stars," from the musical titled "Billy", staged in London in 1975.
- 2 Sir Chimanlal and Lady Krishnagauri Setalvad: parents of Sharda Divan.
- 3 *Kshatriyas*: the "warrior" class, ranked second in the hierarchy of the caste system in ancient India.
- 4 *Brahmin*: the "priestly" and uppermost class of the caste system in ancient India.
- 5 Ambashankar Brijrai: great-grandfather (paternal) of Sharda Divan.
- 6 Harilal Setalvad: paternal grandfather of Sharda Divan.
- 7 J.R.B., Jeejeebhoy, *Dr. Sir Chimanlal H. Setalvad - A Biography* (Bombay, 1939), p. 4.
- 8 Narbheram Raghunathadas Thakore: maternal grandfather of Sharda Divan.
- 9 Motilal C. Setalvad: eldest brother of Sharda Divan. An eminent lawyer, he was appointed the first Attorney-General of independent India.
- 10 Kusumgauri Desai nee Setalvad: Fifth child of Sir Chimanlal and Lady Krishnagauri Setalvad and the sister closest to Sharda Divan.
- 11 Jivanlal C. Setalvad: Brother of Sharda Divan. Achieved prominence as an expert in the field of insurance and was one of the founder members of the Indian Merchants' Chamber in Bombay.
- 12 Venkatrao C. Setalvad: Brother of Sharda Divan.
- 13 Jeejeebhoy, n. 7, pp. 39-42.
- 14 R.V. Parulekar, *Survey of Indigenous Education in the Province of Bombay: 1820-30* (Bombay, 1951), xi/vi-xi/vii quoted in Aparna Basu, "A Century's Journey – Women's Education in the Province of Bombay: 1820-30," in Karuna Channa, ed., *Socialisation, Education and Women -- Explorations in Gender Identity*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 67.
- 15 Wilson College, Centenary of Affiliation to the University of Bombay, *Thoughts on Indian Education* (Bombay, 1961), p. 5.
- 16 The Parsis are a minority sect belonging to the Zoroastrian religion. They originally migrated to Western India for reasons of religious persecution. E. Kulke, *The Parsis in India: A Minority as an Agent of Social Change*, n.d., p. 104.
- 17 Basu, n. 14, p. 71.
- 18 Keshub Chunder Sen. Lecture titled "England's Duties to India", delivered in London on May 24, 1870. Published in K.C. Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen in England -- Diary, Sermons, Addresses & Epistles* (Calcutta, 1938). p.p. 212-213.
- 19 Padma Thakore nee Setalvad: eldest sister of Sharda Divan.
- 20 A. Bryant, *Macaulay* (London, 1932). Excerpt from Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education addressed to the Governor-General Lord Bentinck on February 2, 1835. See Appendices.
- 21 M.R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, Vol. I, 1873-1922, p. 22 as quoted by Aparna Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920* (Delhi, 1974), p. 214.

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22 J. Long, ed., *Adam's Report on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar*, p. 22 as quoted in Basu, n. 21, pp. 72-73.

23 H. A. Stark, *Vernacular Education in Bengal from 1813 to 1912* (Calcutta, 1916), p. 55 as quoted by Aubrey A.J. Zellner, "The Progress of Education in Modern India", Dissertation submitted to the State University of Iowa, 1948, pp. 51-52.

24 J. Sharp, *Selections from Education Records, Part I, 1781-1830, Bureau of Education, India* (Calcutta, 1920), p. 14 as quoted by ibid., p. 52.

25 Arthur Mayhew, *The Education of India: A Study of British Educational Policy in India, 1835-1920, and of its bearing on National Life & Problems in India Today* (London, 1926), pp. 92-93.

26 The Despatch of the Court of Directors of 1854, sometimes called the "Magna Carta of English Education in India". It led to the establishment of universities, the grants-in-aid system, and provincial departments of education. It was the outcome of parliamentary investigation which preceded the renewal of the Charter, 1853, and was influenced by evidence given by C.E. Trevelyan and Duff. Sir Charles Wood, first Viscount Halifax, was President of the Board of Control. See Mayhew, n. 25, pp. 26, 293.

27 Stark, n. 23, pp. 73 et seq, as quoted by Zellner, n. 23, pp. 64-66.

28 B.G. Kher, *The Pageant of Life* (Ahmedabad, 1959), p. 134.

29 Jeejeebhoy, n. 7, p. 27.

30 Mohammed Ali Jinnah: Barrister of Bombay. A nationalist who agitated for and presided over the creation of Pakistan.

31 Motilal Nehru: Lawyer, father of Jawaharlal Nehru and paternal grandfather of Indira Gandhi.

32 Vithalbhai Patel: a prominent Congress leader and the first elected Indian President of the Central Legislative Assembly.

33 Jeejeebhoy, n. 7, p. 69.

34 Speech made by Dr. Madhuriben Shah, Vice-Chancellor of the S.N.D.T. Women's University, Bombay on February 26, 1983 at the felicitation meeting held to honour Sharda Divan on her 80th birthday.

35 Irving Stone, *Immortal Wife* (London, 1950), p. 10.

36 K.C. Desai. He later married Sharda's niece, her elder sister Padma's daughter.

37 Jivanlal Divan: father-in-law of Sharda Divan nee Setalvad. A freedom-fighter and close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, he was one of the principal organisers of the Dandi or Salt March undertaken by Gandhi. He founded the Divan Proprietary High School in Ahmedabad.

38 Mahatma Gandhi.

39 Lady Premila Thackersey: wife of Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, a well-known industrialist and philanthropist of Bombay. First Vice-Chancellor of the Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University.

40 Chaturlaxmi Divan: stepmother-in-law of Sharda Divan nee Setalvad.

41 Quote from article on Sharda Divan titled "Eighty Years of an Exemplary Life" published in *Eve's Weekly*, March 26-April 1, 1983, p. 39.

42 Khadi: handwoven cotton fabric.

43 Rabindranath Tagore: Poet, novelist, essayist and dramatist; recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.

44 G. Ashe, *Gandhi -- A Study in Revolution* (London, 1968), pp. 223-224.

45 Ibid.

46 Bal Gangadhar Tilak: a nationalist known as the *Lokamanya* or "respected by the people".

47 Sir James Meston: Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Finance, 1906-18; Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces 1912-18; Finance Member of the Governor-General's Council, 1918-19.

48 Sir James Meston's Minute of Evidence before the Southborough Committee on Division of Function. *Parliamentary Papers, 1919*, Vol. VI, p. 7045.

49 M.K. Gandhi, *True Education* (Ahmedabad, 1962), p. 242.

50 Well-known public figures and Liberal leaders.

51 Sir Chimanlal H. Setalvad, *Recollections and Reflections* (Bombay, 1946), p.p. 224-225.

52 Sir Reginald Craddock: Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces 1907-12, Member of the Governor-General's Council 1912-1917.

53 Basu, n. 21, p. 74.

54 M.J. Akbar, *Nehru – The Making of India* ((London, 1988), p. 20.

55 J.B. Kripalani: a nationalist, freedom-fighter and veteran Congressman known as the *Acharya* or "teacher".

56 Kher, n. 28, pp. 133-134.

57 Vallabhbhai Patel: known as the *Sardar* or *leader*. Lawyer who became associated with Gandhi in 1918 and participated in the nationalist struggle. He was the President of the Gujarat Congress Committee for many years; President, Indian National Congress, in 1931; member, Interim Government, 1946-47; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home, States, Information and Broadcasting, 1947-50.

58 Anil B. Divan: son of Sharda Divan and an eminent lawyer.

59 Aparna Basu, "The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom," in B.R. Nanda, ed., *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity* (Delhi, 1976), p. 25.

60 Horace Alexander, *Gandhi through Western Eyes* (Bombay, 1969), p. 64.

61 A women's social welfare organization.

62 An organization for social welfare and the upliftment of Indian women initiated and patronized by Mahatma Gandhi.

63 Anjani Desai nee Divan: daughter of Sharda Divan. She is Chairperson and Trustee of the Shraddhanand Mahilashram, Bombay. She has also excelled at the national level in swimming, tennis and golf and has been the recipient of the Arjuna Award for her achievements in golf.

64 Ruskin, quoted by Sharda Divan in her address titled "My Reminiscences" to the Ladies Wing of the Indian Merchants' Chamber, Bombay at the felicitation function in her honour on Friday, January 29, 1988.

65 G.L. Chandavarkar, *Maharshi Karve* (Bombay, 1958), p. 120.

66 Ibid., p. 153.

67 Ibid., p. 151.

68 Premila V. Thackersey, Quote from article titled "As I Look Back – My Fifty years Association with the S.N.D.T. Women's University", published in the Golden Jubilee Commemoration Volume of the S.N.D.T. Women's University (Bombay, 1968), p. 1.

69 Letter from Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India to J.J.D. La Touche, Lieutenant Governor of North-West Provinces, February 22, 1902. *Curzon Papers*, India Office Library, London (205), quoted in Basu, n. 21, p. 75.

70 T. Raleigh, *Lord Curzon in India – Selection of his Speeches* (London, 1906), p. 330.

71 Shalini Divan: second daughter of Sharda Divan. She died of appendicitis at the age of 7.

72 M.K. Gandhi, *True Education* (Ahmedabad, 1962), pp. 96-98, 100.

73 Subhas Chandra Bose: freedom fighter and President of the Indian National Congress, 1938.

74 Bal Gangadhar Kher: lawyer, solicitor, "social worker by choice and politician by necessity" he was appointed the first Chief Minister (Prime Minister) of the state of Bombay in 1937.

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- 75 Sir M. Visvesvaraiyya: Prominent on the pre-Independence Indian political scene and Dewan or Prime Minister of the State of Mysore.
- 76 Sarojini Naidu: poetess and nationalist; President of the Indian National Congress in 1925; attended the Second Round Table Conference in 1931.
- 77 Dr. S. Radhakrishnan: eminent philosopher, scholar and author. President of India dates?
- 78 Narotam Mangaldas *Nicky Desai*; son of Mangaldas and Lilavati Desai and a lawyer by education, son-in-law of Sharda Divan. He was a founder Director of India's most diversified private sector engineering company, Larsen and Toubro Ltd., and was its Chairman and President from 1978 to 1989.
- 79 Jawaharlal Nehru: Nationalist, politician, statesman. First Prime Minister of independent India.
- 80 Rajendra Prasad: Lawyer and politician. President of India 1950-62.
- 81 Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Congress leader of the North-West Frontier Provinces. Recipient of the Bharat Ratna in 1987.
- 82 Sharda Divan, article titled "Home: Pivot of Society" published in the Golden Jubilee Commemoration Volume of the S.N.D.T. Women's University (Bombay, 1968), pp. 104-7.

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Asha Nath is known for her recital of selected *shlokas* from the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* sung in Sanskrit in classical Indian *ragas* and narrated in English. Educated at the J.B. Petit High School for Girls in Bombay and later at the Presentation Convent Girls' High School in Kodaikanal, Asha developed an inherent linguistic ability and talent for languages to obtain a B.A. Honours Degree in French and German from the Elphinstone College, University of Bombay and completed her education with an interpreter's degree from the University of Mainz's Institute for Interpreters in Germersheim, Federal Republic of Germany. Asha lives in New Delhi with her husband, Achal, and two daughters, Amala and Amrita.

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